

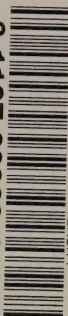


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HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE
AND OTHER STORIES

By the same Author

THE BLACK PRINCE

GASTON DE FOIX

MAHASENA

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COLLECTED POEMS

POEMS—1914-1919

TRANSLATIONS ANCIENT AND MODERN

WITH THE RUSSIANS IN MANCHURIA

A YEAR IN RUSSIA

THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE

LANDMARKS IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

AN OUTLINE OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

RUSSIAN ESSAYS AND STUDIES

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PASSING BY

R.F.C. H.Q.

OVERLOOKED

THE PUPPET SHOW OF MEMORY

H.M. EMBASSY, AND OTHER PLAYS

A TRIANGLE

C

HILDESHEIM

PUNCH AND JUDY, AND OTHER ESSAYS

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE AND OTHER STORIES

BY
MAURICE BARING



LONDON
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UPB

To
MICHAEL AND SYDNEY
*who in Paris
in 1899 were a good
audience for stories.*

P R E F A C E

SOME of these stories originally appeared in the *Morning Post* and were reprinted later; some of them in a book called *Orpheus and Mayfair*; and five of them in a book called *Russian Essays and Studies*; for kindly allowing me to reprint these five here, I have to thank Messrs. Methuen.

My thanks are also due to the Editor of the *Morning Post* for allowing me to reprint the stories, "Half a Minute's Silence" and "The Prodigal who returned too late"; to the Editor of the *Saturday Review* for "The Brass Ring"; and to the Editor of the *London Mercury*, for the two longer stories "Habent sua fata libelli" and "The Alternative"; these appeared in the *London Mercury*, and have not been reprinted since.

The Latin and Greek verse in the story "Habent sua fata libelli" were written by Father R. A. Knox. A learned correspondent complained of historic inaccuracies, also of a lack of probability in this tale. It was not meant to be a contribution to research, nor did it aim at the strictest possible verisimilitude.

MAURICE BARING.

3 GRAY'S INN SQUARE.

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PART I
RUSSIAN STORIES

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE

IT is the custom in Russia for people when they are starting on a journey and leaving a house, to sit down and spend half a minute in silence. Not only the departing guests or members of the family, but those who are remaining, take part in this little silent ceremony. Everybody concerned sits down in silence for about half a minute. They have their little armistice after the bustle of packing is over and before the bustle of the journey (for those who are going), and the routine of everyday life (for those who are remaining behind) begins once more.

And some say that the meaning of this custom was religious ; that the half-minute's silence was originally given to silent prayer ; but others say not. Certainly in the home I am about to describe, although the family to which it belonged was deeply religious and scrupulously orthodox, and although their daily life was interwoven with minute observances of religious ritual, the half-minute's silence here was not specially religious.

There were nineteen people sitting in the—well, not a hall, and not a drawing-room, but in the large open living-room of Prince A.'s country home, an untidy, one-storeyed, shabby Grand Trianon, full of stiff divans and card-tables scored with chalk ; it looked out on a dishevelled garden on one side ; on the other side on to the drive. During that half-minute's silence on that particular September morning this is what those nineteen people were thinking of.

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE & OTHER STORIES

Princess A., the hostess, caught sight of a tree at the bottom of the garden, a stunted willow. She thought, "For the last twenty years I have told the gardener to cut that tree down almost every day—certainly every time I have seen him; and each time he has agreed with alacrity, but it has never been done. To-morrow I will do it myself." Then she added to herself, "How often have I said to myself, 'To-morrow I will do it,' and yet the tree is there." Then she looked at the church and thought of something else.

B., who was a journalist and dabbled in belles-lettres, was wondering whether two roubles was too little to give the butler. He had only stayed a night. He had packed his own clothes. He had given no trouble. He had a ten-rouble note. That was too much—he reflected that the butler's wages were proportionately greater than his precarious salary, and far more secure; on the other hand, he remembered a servant once telling him that needy professional people were as a rule far more generous than the rich; and he further reflected that a boy who had rich parents at a school needed a tip just as badly as a boy who had poor parents, and then he thought, "What, after all, is ten roubles?"

V. was a foreigner. He was glad to be going; he had looked forward to the visit; but no sooner had he arrived than he had said to himself, "Only an insane man can leave his own house to mingle with eighteen unknown people of different habits, with not one of whom he feels in complete sympathy." And yet now during this half-minute he felt as sad at going away as if he were going to school for the first time; he felt Time rushing by him like a whirlwind; he felt Death whetting his scythe in his ear; he felt ready to sob; then he got up and kissed his hostess's hand.

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE

C., the son of the house, was thinking of French poets. He couldn't remember the third line of that poem. Was it :

“ Et, comme un air qui sonne au bois . . . au bois . . . ”

What ? He couldn't remember.

Anna D.—she was unmarried—was thinking of her fiancé, that is to say, her late fiancé ; the engagement was broken off. She felt she had been right, quite right to break it off. What made her think this was the colour of B.'s moustache which reminded her of the moustache of the man she had promised to marry—the man she had subsequently felt she would sooner die than marry.

E. (who was a neighbour, middle-aged, and rather fat) suddenly became aware that all the carefully constructed stopping had come out of his wisdom tooth, leaving, as it seemed, an unfathomable abyss. Would he have to go back to the dentist so soon ? So very soon ?

Miss F., homely and German, and a governess, who had lived there for years, thought of a remark that B. had made at dinner the night before. He had said he thought Switzerland *ugly*. This was not the first time the paradox had recurred to her ; and every time it did so she was convulsed.

G. (seven years old and a boy) looked at an old man with a white beard who had promised him some Persian stamps, and was calculating by what post they could arrive after the old gentleman's departure. He hoped he wouldn't die.

H. was a painter, not a professional painter, and he thought of the yellow trees framing the leaf-strewn untidy avenue ; the little silver strip of water beyond ; the brown hill, the white church on the hill, and the steely sky. “ Surely,” he thought, “ I shall never forget that effect of light ” ; he had been too shy to try and record it on paper during his stay.

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE & OTHER STORIES

I.—he was twenty-nine, and had no particular trade—was to dine that night at the officers' mess of a neighbouring town ; he was wondering whether it would make him very ill—he was a hypochondriac—and whether it was really true that a spoonful of oil before dinner prevented a man getting drunk. Wouldn't it make one sick ? Had any one really tried it ?

Miss J. It was her second year out. Five people wanted to marry her, and one man had shot himself because she had told him he had no will. In that half-minute she made a decision : she decided (*a*) that she would be a woman doctor ; (*b*) that she would eventually, somewhere and somehow, marry a kind man.

K., the old man with a beard who had promised the Persian stamps, was thinking—he was a diplomatist—of last night's game of cards and wondering if he would have won if he had doubled hearts. Not that he cared.

L., who was a student, thought about a ghost story that had been told the night before : not exactly a ghost story, but a vision some one had had of a small event—an invalid taking a bath, which had happened a week after the vision, and had been seen by some one else. “ If there is no such thing as time,” he thought, “ one might see the Parthenon or next Tuesday. Perhaps the world is a film, every picture of which is eternally moving and eternally stationary.”

M. was an old lady. She heard distant noises from the farm : cluckings and crowings. She thought of St. Peter, and wondered how you could have so much faith and so little courage. Then she thought, “ Such things happen so quickly—in half a second—half a second and a man is a hero or ruined for ever. His action is unconscious . . . half a second ! ”

N. was a married woman, between thirty and forty. She had been asked to do something she would have

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE

liked to do. She had refused. She wondered why, with the will and character she knew she possessed, she had refused. "We are surrounded," she thought, "by invisible spiders' webs; the slightest effort would break them; but why can't I make *that* effort—because I am afraid of what my sister-in-law will say."

O., who was the sister-in-law in question, was making up her mind to copy N.'s tea-gown—the one she had worn the night before—in a different colour.

P. had been in the Army, and still held some kind of military appointment somewhere; his hair was grey; his mind was with his heart, and that was at Biarritz, where Madame Z. was living with her husband. There was no possibility of going to Biarritz.

Q. was thirty-five. He was engaged to be married to a nice girl. He had had rather a tumultuous past; debts were its main feature—debts which still remained to be paid. The wedding was to be next week. That morning he had had a letter from Isaaks, the moneylender, demanding to be paid—capital and interest—500,000 roubles (£50,000). It was impossible. What was to be done? He made up his mind he would shoot Isaaks, shoot him dead.

A man came in and said the horses were there.

The little boy was the first to rise. He had been told ever since he could remember to get up first from his chair on these occasions. Prince A., the host, started from his reverie. He had been looking at the church through the window, and thinking of what he always thought of. He always thought of one thing: his son who was buried in that church.

The little armistice was at an end.

POGROM

COUNT X. was a landowner who lived in the south of Russia, not far from one of the large manufacturing towns. He spent the whole summer in a small country house, about six miles from the town, with his wife and children. Not far from the house, at about a mile's distance, was a village which was bigger than an ordinary village and less big than an ordinary town. The greater part of the population consisted of Jews ; they were poor Jews mostly, some of them very poor indeed. The Count and his wife knew the people of the place well, and their relations with the poor Jews were of the friendliest description ; they were constantly employing them to do small jobs, and their special friends were the tailor and the bootmaker, whose shops were in the Jewish bazaar, the poorest quarter of the place. The bootmaker's name was Gertzel, and the tailor was called Daniel.

When the Dreyfus case was drawing to its close, the whole of this population was in a great state of excitement, and Countess X. used every afternoon to go and give Gertzel and Daniel the latest news. Just before the result of the final court-martial at Rennes was known, Countess X. received a telegram from a friend of hers abroad saying that Dreyfus had been acquitted. She went post-haste with the news to the village, and soon the whole place was in a tumult of thanksgiving and rejoicing. Next day, when the authentic news of the verdict arrived, she was obliged to go and tell the disappointing news.

During all those summer months nothing else had been

POGROM

discussed in this little place ; and, as everywhere else, the world was split up into two factions ; and in the Countess' family, while she and her husband believed violently in the innocence of Dreyfus, her brother-in-law and her uncle were equally firmly convinced of his guilt, and equally violent in their affirmations of it. In the village there was a strong orthodox faction which earnestly longed for the death of the traitor, and the Jewish populace cared more for his acquittal than for their own affairs. When Countess X. imparted to them the disappointing verdict, they lamented bitterly : all the more so on account of the false joy they had experienced the day before. And in the whole population there were no two beings more downcast and upset by the result than Gertzel and Daniel.

It was in the autumn of that year, shortly after the result of the Dreyfus case became known, that one morning Gertzel and Daniel appeared in Countess X.'s garden and requested to see her.

Gertzel was a thin, solidly built man, with dark tangled hair and mild, soft eyes. He had a thick, untidy beard, a dirty, loose shirt with a torn collar. Daniel was smaller, and younger ; he wore no beard, and his eyes were penetrating and glistening ; he was quiet and modest, and was passionately fond of reading books.

Countess X. came out and asked them whether they wanted work.

" No, it is not work that we want," said Gertzel ; " we want to know if we may bring our furniture to-day, and put it in your stables ? It will not take up very much room," he added.

" Certainly you may," said Countess X. ; " but why do you want to get rid of your furniture ? Is it your feast day ? "

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE & OTHER STORIES

"No, it is very far from being our feast day—it is little enough a feast day," said Gertzel; "but we want you in your kindness to let us store our furniture in your stables—in the barn, perhaps. It will take little room. There are some chairs, a table, and the tools and implements that are necessary for our work. And Daniel has a lot of books he would like to bring, too—some of those which your Grace gave him, if your Grace remembers, last year."

"You may certainly bring your things," said the Countess, "and put them in the stables or in the barn or anywhere else you please. But why do you want to do this?"

"It is because," said Gertzel, "to-morrow morning there will be a Pogrom."

"How a Pogrom?" asked the Countess.

"A Pogrom," said Gertzel, "an ordinary Pogrom. It has been arranged; the date is fixed for to-morrow. It will be all right if we may store our furniture in your barn; and if we may ask as much, we have several friends who would like to do the same. For in that case all will be well, and we shall incur no loss. We cannot afford the loss this year: we are all poor people; we cannot afford to lose our property."

"But," said the Countess, "I don't understand. Who is going to make this Pogrom? The people here?"

"God forbid!" said Gertzel. "We are living with all the people here in peace. They are coming from O. (O. was the big manufacturing town) and from A. (another town about fifty miles distant). They are coming by train; they will arrive early to-morrow morning. The Pogrom will take place in the morning; it will be all over by the evening, and they will go back by the night train."

POGROM

"But who," the Countess asked, "and what are *they*?"

"They say they have been sent. Some people say it is the Tsar's orders; others that it is the Governor; but what does it matter? In any case, they have been sent to make a Pogrom."

"Surely," said the Countess, "if you inform the police, measures will be taken to prevent this. It is absurd! It can't possibly happen!"

"It must be," said Gertzel; and Daniel nodded his head in agreement, and repeated, "It must be: it is so decreed!"

"It has all been arranged," said Gertzel. "To-morrow there will be the Pogrom. Let us bring our furniture to your barn, our furniture and our friends' furniture, and all will be well."

"It must be prevented!" said the Countess. "You must go to the police."

"It is useless," said Gertzel; "it cannot be prevented; it has been arranged for to-morrow."

And no argument was of any avail; they merely repeated over and over again that the Pogrom was to be, and they left, with tears of gratitude in their eyes for having been allowed to store their furniture in the Count's stables.

The Countess went to her husband and related what had happened. They sent for Ivan, the mōuzhik, who washed the plates, and who, being a native of the place, would be likely to know what was going on, and they asked him if it were true that there was to be a Pogrom.

"Yes, your Grace," he said, "it is quite true. There will be a Pogrom to-morrow; it has been arranged."

"Who has arranged it?" asked the Countess.

"I couldn't say," answered Ivan; "but it has been arranged."

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE & OTHER STORIES

"You mean the people here?" asked the Countess—"they will attack the Jews?"

"God forbid!" said Ivan. "The Jews are a nice people. We live with them in peace; but everything may happen. Sometimes an orthodox Russian is worse than a Jew. But the Jews were much offended by the last Pogrom, and they have been giving false evidence, and attributing to many people crimes which they had not committed."

"When was the last Pogrom?" asked the Countess.

"It was in the spring," said Ivan, "when your Grace was away."

"And did they kill the Jews?" asked the Count.

"God forbid!" Ivan answered. "They sinned a little, and they destroyed some of the Jews' property, but murder—God forbid! they were innocent of that!"

"But who is going to do this?" asked the Count.

"They will come from various places," said Ivan. "They will come by the night train from O. and A. They will arrive in the morning; there will be a Pogrom, and they will go away."

"But who?" asked the Count.

"Those who are sent," said Ivan.

"But who is sending them?" repeated the Count.

"I couldn't say," said Ivan.

"How do you know this is so?" asked the Countess.

"Everybody knows it," said Ivan—"all the morning carts have been arriving from all the neighbouring villages just as when there is a fair."

"What for?" asked the Countess.

"To take away all that is left after the Pogrom," said Ivan. "It is advantageous for the peasants to get the property of the Jews and to pay nothing at all for it."

"It must be prevented," said the Count.

POGROM

Ivan smiled, and merely repeated that there would be a Pogrom on the following day, for so it had been arranged, and nothing more could be got out of him.

The Count went and interviewed the local police sergeant and spoke seriously to him about the matter. The police sergeant shrugged his shoulders and wrung his hands, and said that he could do nothing ; what was his authority in the place ? What could he and two policemen do against the populace ? “ If there is to be a Pogrom, there will be a Pogrom,” he said. “ We can do nothing. We should only be killed too. There is nothing to be done.”

All day long Jews from the village who knew the Count and the Countess came to their house, bringing with them furniture and goods of every description, till the whole stables were filled with them, and all day long large creaking carts drove slowly into the village from the neighbouring villages, bringing the peasants who had come to bear off the booty when the Pogrom should be over. And they met and conversed with the Jews in the friendliest manner possible, discussing the Pogrom merely as an event of not very considerable importance, but as a fact, such as an eclipse or a feast day, about which there could be no possible doubt, and no possible change.

The Countess had a further interview with Sasha, the cook, a peasant woman who was also a native of the place ; but she, like Ivan, merely repeated over and over again that the Pogrom was fixed for the morrow, and that it would be executed by people sent for the purpose, who would come by train from the various big towns.

The Count went once more to the police sergeant, and told him to take some steps ; he replied that he would do his best, but that he was a married man, and the Count must have pity on him, that there were no steps

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to be taken—that he could do nothing—that nothing could be done—that nobody could do anything !

The next morning, as soon as the Countess awoke, Sasha the cook came into her room and said :

“ There will be no Pogrom : it has been put off ! ”

THE ANTICHRIST

IN the village of X., which is in the government of O., in Central Russia, there were two men: one was called Michael and the other was called Andrew. They were both deeply religious and concerned with the things of a world which is not this world. They spent days and nights in reading the Scriptures and in pondering over the meaning of difficult texts. They had both resolved in their early youth never to marry, for they considered that the human race had something so radically bad about it that the sooner it came to an end the better. They decided, therefore, that it was their duty not to prolong its existence. But when they attained to early manhood the parents of Andrew contracted an alliance for him, and he was wedded to a girl named Masha. Their union was not blessed with offspring, and Michael, who continued to lead a solitary life, with rigorous fasting and uninterrupted meditation, said such was the will of Providence. The young wife of Andrew did not share the views of the mystic, and she yearned to be the mother of a child. Unbeknown to her husband, she sought one night the Wise Woman of the village, who was skilled in finding lost objects, and who was versed in the properties of herbs, and knew the words of power which cured the sick of dreadful disease.

Masha sought the Wise Woman in the night, and told her her trouble. The Wise Woman lit a candle, muttered a brief saying in which the name of King David was mentioned, and that of a darker Prince. She gave her

HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE & OTHER STORIES

a small green herb, telling her to eat it on the first moonless night in June, and that her wish would be fulfilled.

Masha obeyed the Wise Woman's behest. A year passed by and the wish of her heart was granted. A son was born to her. And Masha and Andrew rejoiced greatly over this. But when Michael heard of it his spirit was troubled. He searched the Scriptures, and the meaning of the event became clear to him. He sought Andrew and said to him :

"This is the work of Satan. You have dabbled in black magic, and you are in danger of eternal perdition. Moreover, the truth has been revealed to me—the child which has been born to you is none other than the Antichrist, of which the Book of Revelation tells. And that is why our poor country is distressful, seething with trouble, sedition, and revolt, and why our Sovereign is vexed, and why evil days have fallen upon Russia, our Mother. We must slay the Antichrist, and immediately the dark cloud will be lifted from our land, and peace and prosperity shall come to us once more."

That night Michael bade Andrew and Masha come to his house. It was a small, one-storeyed, wooden cottage, thatched with straw. It was swept and clean, and in one corner of the room were many glittering images of the Queen of Heaven and the Saints, before which burned small red lights ; and besides this Michael had erected a shrine on which more than a dozen thin waxen tapers were burning. Michael welcomed Andrew and his wife to his house, and the elders of the village also, and they spent an hour in chanting and in prayer, each holding a candle in his hand ; but to the priest he said no word of this matter, for he did not trust him nor believe him to be possessed of celestial grace. After they had prayed for an hour, Michael said to Masha :

THE ANTICHRIST

“ Go home and fetch your child.”

Masha obeyed, and returned presently, bearing the infant for whose advent she had so sorely longed, and whose coming had been the cause of great joy to her. Michael took the infant and said :

“ In the body of this child is the power of Satan : in the body of this child is the Antichrist of whom the Scriptures tell—this is the cause of the misfortunes which have visited our dear country, and vexed the spirit of our Lord and Sovereign.”

He then blew out all the lights and the tapers in the room : it was pitch dark, and no sound was heard save the muttering of Michael’s continuous prayer. Masha trembled, for she was afraid. Michael took the infant. It lay quite still, for it was asleep.

And as Michael took the infant, he said, “ We must exorcise the spirit and slay the Antichrist, who has been born in this child to be the bane of Russia and to vex the heart of our Sovereign ! ”

And Michael bade the people who were gathered together in the room—there were five men, the eldest in the village, and seven women—be prepared for the great event, and he lifted his voice, and in a wailing whisper he addressed the Evil Spirit.

“ Evil Spirit,” he said, “ Antichrist, of whom the Holy Scriptures tell, through the dark dealings of our brother Andrew and his wife, who have trafficked with Satan, thou hast found a way into the body of this child, but it is written that the troubles of Russia and of our Sovereign shall be at their thickest at thy advent, but shall diminish and pass away with thy disappearance. Evil Spirit, I conjure thee, leave the body of this child.”

Then the infant cried plaintively, twice.

“ Hark ! ” said Michael, in a solemn voice, “ the spirit

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of the Antichrist is speaking. Hark to the cry of Satan, who is leaving the body of the child. Pray, pray with all your might, and help me to slay the Antichrist."

And fear came upon everybody, nor durst they utter in the stillness, but their spirits were spellbound and seemed to be drawn, tense and taut as stretched wires, in that effort of prayer for the passing of the spirit of Satan and for the slaying of the Antichrist.

The infant cried once again—and then it cried no more ! . . .

"The Antichrist has been slain," said Michael, and a deeper stillness came on the assembly. "The Antichrist," said Michael, "must be buried." And he walked out of his cottage into the yard where in a shed his horse and cart were kept. He unloosed his horse and said, "Whither the horse shall lead, thither must we follow."

The horse trotted slowly down the deserted street. That night there was neither moon nor star in the sky. Beyond the village was a marshy plain. It was just before dawn, and in the thick velvet darkness of the sky there was a glow as of a living sapphire. They reached the marsh, and there the horse stopped, and began to browse.

"It is here that the Antichrist must be buried," said Michael. And they buried the infant by the reedy marsh. And all this time neither Andrew nor Masha, nor the elders, nor the women who were there, spoke a single word ; and when they had finished burying the infant a breeze came from the east, and the dawn, grey and chilly, trembled over the horizon, and the wild ducks swept from the marsh, uttered their cry, and flew away into distance, seeking the fields.

The spell that had kept this assembly mute and speechless vanished with the vanishing darkness. The noises

THE ANTICHRIST

of life began : the creaking of carts was heard from the village, and the cocks were crowing.

Andrew and Masha looked at each other, and a great fear came upon them, and indeed upon all the assembly, for what they had done. They did not speak, but returned severally to their homes ; and Masha, when she reached her home, too frightened to cry or even to speak, sat motionless before the swinging cradle which hung from the roof of her cottage, and which was now empty. And Andrew durst not look at her. Presently he left the house and sought the dwelling of the priest. The priest let him in, and there he found Michael, who, likewise overcome with terror and misgivings as to what had been done, had come to tell the story.

The priest reported the whole matter to the local policeman, who in his turn reported it to the police captain of the district, and three days afterwards Michael, Andrew, Masha, and the others were locked up in the gaol of a neighbouring town, and a day after their arrest an old woman of the village sought out the police captain and asked to see him.

“ I was present,” she said to him, “ at the slaying of the Antichrist. I held the candle in my hands myself when the evil spirit was exorcised, and the cause of all Russia’s trouble was destroyed. They say the Tsar has given money to the others for having destroyed his enemy ; and I, who am poor and old, and who was there also, have received nothing. Let me receive my due. Give me the money that the Tsar owes me, for I also helped to slay the Antichrist.”

This story is true. It happened last September, and was recorded in the newspapers, with many more details than I have told. And at the station of Kozlov, as I have

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already related, in the government of Tambov, between the hours of midnight and 2 a.m., a railway guard told it to myself and a newsvendor, and when he had finished telling it he sighed and bewailed the blindness of his fellow-creatures, the peasants of Russian villages, who, as he wisely said, had so much kindness in their hearts, but were often led through their ignorance to do dreadful deeds.

“ DIRGE IN MARRIAGE ”

THIS story was told me by a doctor. It happened in the village in the government of Tambov. There was a peasant called Vicharev who had three daughters ; one of them was called Anushka, one Duniasha, and the third Natasha. Their father was well off, but extraordinarily close-fisted ; his thirst for land and his ambition to accumulate were unlimited. He arranged an advantageous match for his eldest daughter, Duniasha, and was exerting all his wits to find a husband for his younger daughter who should be equally well-to-do, so that the two weddings might take place on the same day, and thereby save him trouble and expense. His third daughter was considered to be too young as yet to marry.

Now Anushka repeated over and over again, not without tears, that she did not wish to be married ; but her father and her mother (whose will, always feeble, had now completely ceased to work, owing to years of unceasing compliance with the views and the wishes of her domineering husband) paid no attention to this.

At last Vicharev succeeded in striking a bargain with one of his neighbours named Krustaliev, the purport of which was that Krustaliev's son, Dimitri, should marry Anushka, in return for which Vicharev promised to get him some horses at an unusually low price, since Vicharev was a horse-dealer on a small scale. The bargain was struck, and the matter was arranged, and Anushka was told that she was to marry Dimitri.

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Dimitri was a young man aged eighteen, nice-looking, and not unintelligent ; notwithstanding this, when Anushka was informed of the matter, she burst into a storm of tears, and declared no power on earth could induce her to marry him. Her father and mother, however, took no notice of her tears and her protest, and invited their friends to an evening party to celebrate the engagement. Now the reason Anushka was determined not to marry Dimitri, was that she loved her sister's affianced husband, Ivan. He, for his part, was quite unaware of this, and indeed nobody knew of it in the whole village except an old man, Alexis by name, who was said to be versed in astrology and whom the peasants often consulted in matters which concerned the other world. Anushka went to Alexis and told him her story ; he promised to cast her horoscope and to see what could be done, and he bade her return to him in a few days. She did so. When Alexis saw her he shook his head.

" There is nothing to be done, child," he said, " the stars are against you : you must wed Dimitri ; but no good will come of it, neither to you nor to him."

Then Anushka asked him if he could not give her a love philtre or a charm, which would make Ivan love her.

" I can give you a charm," said Alexis, " and I can give you love philtres, but I cannot turn the stars from their courses, nor prevent you wedding Dimitri in the church, although no good shall come of it, either to you or to him. There is nothing to be done, save to obey ; this matter is the business of Providence."

And so Anushka went home, taking neither philtre nor charm, and spent the whole day weeping at her work ; but her parents did not even trouble to scold her, so surely did they know that their will would be accomplished. And in the evenings Ivan and Dimitri would

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come to their cottage and sing and play on the *Balalaika* ; and while Duniasha and Ivan looked at each other with love, and spoke in whispers of a thousand nothings, like two happy birds twittering in a tree, Anushka said no word to Dimitri, although he was gentle with her and civil-spoken ; and he attributed her silence and her gloomy look to bashfulness and modesty.

When the evening of Vicharev's party arrived, the whole village came to his house. And some of the gentry from the landowner's house came to look on at the dancing. The small room of Vicharev's cottage was crowded to overflowing, a little space being left in the centre for the dancers. Outside the cottage there were more people, those for whom there was no room inside, and they crowded round the door and windows, straining and craning their necks to get a glimpse of the festivity. Those who were at the window, finding that the window-panes got in their way, broke the glass and put their heads through the empty sash. Inside, some one was playing on a large concertina, and the dancers walked up and down the room with faces of grave and solemn indifference, performing the necessary steps and singing the usual chant. The couples paced to and fro opposite each other, and at the end of every verse of the chanted music, each girl was kissed by her partner.

When this dance was over sunflower seeds were handed round on a plate to the guests, and glasses of tea were brought for the gentry ; then a soldier who was home on leave, performed a solo in the centre of the room, dancing and stamping according to intricate rule, until he could no more.

Duniasha looked radiantly happy ; she was dressed in pale green, and wore a necklace of bright beads ; but Anushka, in her pink silk finery, looked as white as

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a ghost, and said no word during the whole evening. And when Dimitri danced with her and kissed her, she seemed no more to notice him than if he had been a phantom.

They danced all night, but never once during all those hours of mirth and gaiety, did Anushka smile.

Three weeks later preparations were made for the wedding. Vicharev bought provisions ; the wedding was to be a magnificent one. The landowner lent his horses, and Anushka and Duniasha were to be driven to the church in two troikas. Dimitri had a new salmon-pink shirt for the occasion, and in his high boots there was an unusual number of creases ; he appeared with pride to show himself to Anushka, but she took no notice of him. On her wedding day she was paler than ever, and her eyes were red with crying. Dimitri asked her if anything was the matter with her and whether she was not feeling well ; but she said that she was perfectly well. So he attributed her strange appearance and ways to the inscrutable habits of womankind, and asked no further questions. But, shortly before the wedding pairs were to leave for the church, Anushka went to her mother and said that she could not marry Dimitri. Her mother said that she supposed the child had another sweetheart ; such was the way of girls. But if she had, it was of no consequence, she said ; she would soon forget him. In any case she was to marry Dimitri, and that immediately.

Then Anushka broke into a passion of weeping, and begged and implored her mother not to let her marry Dimitri ; and her mother lost patience, and said she deserved to be beaten ; that she never heard such nonsense in her life.

“ Now stop that crying,” she ended by saying, “ or I

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will call your father, and he shall put an end to this nonsense ! ”

Then Anushka dried her tears and said, “ Very well, since it is so, let it be so. But I will never be Dimitri’s wife ! ”

Then the troikas drove up to the cottage door, their bells jangling and tinkling, and the bridal couples all in their best clothes were driven off at a canter to the church, and the wedding took place. And Anushka and Duniasha were crowned with gold crowns, and walked round the altar (which was placed in the centre of the church with a tall candle on it) in memory of David dancing round the Ark, according to the rite of the Orthodox Church. After the ceremony was over, they drove home once more, and the feasting, which had already lasted one day, began again. The two bridegrooms were taken by their friends through the village, stopping at nearly every cottage to have their healths drunk, and to join in the toasts, while crowds of children followed them, some of them beating small tom-toms and scrambling every fifty yards or so for sugar, which was thrown to them in handfuls by the bridegrooms and their friends.

Towards the evening the bridegrooms were fairly intoxicated, although they could both walk quite straight and speak without difficulty. In Vicharev’s house an uproarious feast ended in general music and dancing, which took place on the green in front of the cottage. In the yard behind the house a special chamber, like a tent, had been made for Anushka, hung with pieces of striped linen. The dancing company ultimately moved from Vicharev’s house and visited various parts of the village, settling now here and now there, and gaining fresh liveliness and zest at each place where it settled. Anushka was left alone, and shortly afterwards, Dimitri returned.

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He went into the cottage and saw that it was empty. He then went into the yard and into the tent which had been prepared ; and glimmering in the darkness he saw the tall white figure of Anushka standing up. He called to her, but she did not answer. Being half-intoxicated, he could not see clearly, and he was not sure whether it was in reality Anushka or not that he seemed to see. He called once more, as loudly as he could, and, receiving no answer, he walked up to her and grasped her by the arm, and as he did so her whole body swung backwards and forwards as though it were dancing on air. Then in a moment he grew sober, for he realised that Anushka had hanged herself, and he went and shouted for the neighbours. The body was cut down, and efforts were made to restore her to life, but she had already been dead about an hour, and there was nothing more to be done.

The next day Dimitri's father and Vicharev held a consultation ; Vicharev even said that he considered his bargain cancelled, and Dimitri's father, after a great deal of argument, refused to admit that this was so. Ultimately Vicharev's cunning mind found a way out of the matter. " Why should not Dimitri," he said, " marry Natasha, my third daughter ? It is true she is only fifteen, but she is a good strong girl, and will make him a good wife. And then," he added, " we can have the wedding at once, so that the food shall not be wasted, and we shall thus be spared the burden and expense of two weddings."

So this was arranged, and the priest was informed of it. But the priest declined to celebrate the wedding, and said that such a proceeding was unchristian and inhuman ; they must be married, he said, after a decent interval of time had elapsed.

Vicharev and Dimitri's father were forced to comply,

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for public opinion in the village was entirely on the side of the priest ; but the wedding food, so far from being wasted, did double service all the same, for it served to satisfy the guests who thronged to Anushka's funeral ; so that in these days in the village there was both dirge in marriage and mirth in funeral.

THE GOVERNOR'S NIECE

IRINA ANDREVNA T. was a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl aged twenty-two. She went to lectures at the St. Petersburg University in the daytime ; in the evening she went to balls and parties. Irina was an orphan, but she lived with an aunt of hers in a large house in St. Petersburg, where on Thursday evenings there was always a considerable gathering of girls and young men, officers chiefly.

When the war broke out in 1904, Irina spent all the days at the hospital, learning to tend the sick and the wounded, and making bandages and clothes for the soldiers at the war. In 1905, when peace was declared, and followed by tumultuous events, she was deeply infected by the atmosphere of excitement which prevailed everywhere, the wild hopes and the great expectations. She went to public meetings and attended private discussions—the private discussions of small groups of students, men and women, which took place in private houses. All the people who attended these informal meetings belonged, as far as their political opinions were concerned, to the Extreme Left. Some of them called themselves Social Democrats, others Social Revolutionaries. Irina's special friend belonged to the extremer shade of the latter party. Irina's nature was enthusiastic ; she hated compromise. She wanted all or nothing. Violent means such as terrorism or assassination seemed to her of no account where the cause was great and the end noble.

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As the months went on, she became more and more closely bound to the more ardent spirits among the Social Revolutionaries, and they regarded her as one of their most inspiring leaders. But she continued during all this time to live the ordinary life of the St. Petersburg society, to talk and dance with the young officers at evening parties, and go to the opera, and to take part in sledging and ski-ing parties. Neither her relations nor any of her acquaintances suspected the intensity of the inner life that was going on within her. They knew she was interested in politics, but so was everybody else. Her friends chaffed her for being what they called "red"; but then a great many people were "red."

In February 1906, her uncle, General Steinberg, a brother of her deceased father, was appointed to the Governorship of O., a large manufacturing city. It was just at this time that she joined the branch of the Social Revolutionaries which called themselves Maximalists, and whose business it was to remove by violence the persons whom they considered to be obstacles in the way of their cause. These people, when they had decided that some one should be removed, drew lots among themselves as to who should accomplish the deed of destruction.

It so happened that, in February 1906, the Executive Committee of the Maximalists condemned General Steinberg to death because he had suppressed riots in the town of O., during which affray a number of workmen had been killed and wounded. Lots were drawn as to who should kill General Steinberg—and the lot fell to Irina, his niece. She received the decision with calm, and made preparations for leaving St. Petersburg. She told her aunt she was going to Moscow to stay with some intimate friends of the family: from

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Moscow it is but a short distance to O. Her relations saw her off at the station, also a young man in the regiment of the Chevalier-Gardes, who was particularly devoted to her. She seemed in excellent spirits.

When she arrived at Moscow she went straight to O., and stayed at the hotel, from whence she wrote a letter to her uncle saying that she was on her way to the estate of her St. Petersburg relations, which was a night's journey from O. Everything was made easy for her, for the next morning she received a letter from him asking her to come to luncheon at half-past twelve.

The next morning at the appointed time she started off in a sledge to the Governor's house, wrapped in a fur *shuba*, and in her muff was concealed a small dynamite bomb capable of enormous destruction.

Her uncle greeted her with the utmost simplicity and affection. He was a short, grey-haired man between fifty and sixty, with a thick grey moustache and kind blue eyes. He was a widower, and had no children. He took her into his sitting-room.

"My dear little Irina," he said, kissing her on both cheeks, "it is years since I've seen you; I should not have recognised you, you've grown into such a lovely grown-up creature. It is lucky that I have been appointed here, just on your way to X. (the country estate of Irina's relations), but why did you go to the hotel? Another time you must stay here. And mind, I expect to see you often now; you must stop here every time you go to X. There is always plenty of room in this old barrack of a house. But come, we will go and have something to eat." And he took her into the dining-room. "We shall be quite alone," he said. "It is better, isn't it? When you were a little girl, when we were all at X. together, you used to love pancakes; you never could have enough;

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so I've had some made to-day. My cook understands how to make them."

Irina blurted out a few confused phrases. Her uncle could not get over the fact that she was grown up ; that she was a tall and pretty girl. He took her to the window to observe her properly, and he kept on making exclamations of admiration and surprise. Then he led her to the sideboard, and chose out for her titbits among the hot and cold *zakuski* (hors-d'œuvre) that were there.

"It does one good," he said, "to see a face like yours in this detestable hole. I can't tell you what a life it is. One never has a moment's peace, and nobody is satisfied. There are fifteen or sixteen different parties in the town, all quarrelling. I have to settle everything. There are Revolutionaries, Social Democrats, Social Revolutionaries, Maximalists, Minimalists, merchants, students, Jews, anti-Jews, Reactionaries, the Alliance of the Russian People—all fighting against each other, and all appealing to me to settle their difficulties ; and if one does manage to keep things smooth, what thanks does one get from the Government ? Absolutely none. The other day all the Reactionaries, the Alliance of the Russian People, and so forth, met together and sang the National Hymn and collected a crowd of hooligans, and went to set fire to the school. I had to go down and make a speech to them, and it was with the greatest difficulty I got them away.

"Then the other day there was a man called Savin, who was arrested for making revolutionary propaganda among the troops. He sent and appealed to me to be allowed to go and see his son, who, he said, was dying of scarlet fever. I gave him permission, and it turned out that the son had not got scarlet fever at all ; that the whole thing was a pretext ; and he took advantage of the occasion to shoot a policeman and to get away. The result

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of this is that the Reactionaries here say I am a Revolutionary, and, of course, the Revolutionaries say I'm a satrap and a brutal oppressor, and all the rest of it. But it doesn't matter what one does, it is impossible to satisfy any one. And every day I receive threatening letters from both sides : letters from people telling me I am a traitor to my country, that I am sold to the Jews and in league with England and International finance ; and others saying that I am an executioner, and the enemy of freedom and of light. However, why should I bore you with all these stories ? Let's talk of more cheerful things."

They sat down at the table.

" Here are the pancakes," he said. " The country is turned upside down, but we have to go on eating pancakes just the same, don't we ? The best thing is not to think at all in times like this."

Irina looked at him and smiled ; she found it difficult to speak. But he did not give her much opportunity, for he went on gaily, talking first about one thing, then about another—of the coming elections, of the plays that were being acted in St. Petersburg and Moscow, of the modern literature and its hysterical tendencies ; and he told many amusing anecdotes illustrating the strange anomalies and the curious ideas that were rife in the present condition of things.

When they had finished eating, he said, " Now, you must come into my own sitting-room, where no one is allowed to disturb me, and I will have at least a half-hour of human intercourse before I go back to my convict's existence ; because, you know, my dear, a Governor's life is worse than a convict's. At least, a convict does not have to make up his mind twenty hundred times a day about questions which cannot be solved at all."

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He led her into his sitting-room, which was as simply furnished as possible : it contained a large writing-table and a low divan ; the carpets had holes in them ; there was a gramophone and a small piano.

“ That gramophone,” he said, “ is my one consolation. When I am tired I turn it on and listen to gipsy songs and to Caruso.” He hummed a tune from an Italian opera. “ It’s a beautiful gramophone ; you must hear it,” and he fixed a Caruso record on it which sang a song from *Cavalleria Rusticana*. When this was over he talked on for about twenty minutes, of the memories of his youth, of his travels, and many trifling episodes concerning their common relations and acquaintances. Presently he looked at his watch. “ My time is really up,” he said, “ and now I want to talk to you seriously. You know, Irina, I am alone in the world, and you have got no parents either ; so that in a kind of way I look upon myself as your father, and I want you to treat me like a father. I want you to come here whenever you like, and to confide in me if ever you have anything that troubles you in any way. And I will always be ready to do anything I can for you ; because, you know, little Irina, I am very, very fond of you. And now, I’m afraid my time is up, and I must go back to my work.”

He kissed her on both cheeks, and made the sign of the cross on her face. “ God bless you,” he said.

Irina left the house, and the General rang for his aide-de-camp and settled down to his work.

Ten minutes later a loud explosion was heard in the street where the hotel was situated at which Irina had stopped. She had thrown her bomb, but the street was empty at the time, and she had killed no one save herself.

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

SITTING opposite me in the second-class carriage of the express train which was crawling at a leisurely pace from Moscow to the south was a little girl, who looked as if she were about twelve years old, with her mother. The mother was a large fair-haired person, with a good-natured expression. They had a dog with them, and the little girl, whose whole face twitched every now and then from St. Vitus's dance, got out at nearly every station to buy food for the dog. On the same side of the carriage, in the opposite corner, another lady (thin, fair, and wearing a pince-nez) was reading the newspaper. She and the mother of the child soon made friends over the dog. That is to say, the dog made friends with the strange lady and was reproved by its mistress, and the strange lady said, "Please don't scold him. He is not in the least in my way, and I like dogs." They then began to talk.

The large lady was going to the country. She and her daughter had been ordered to go there by the doctor. She had spent six weeks in Moscow under medical treatment, and they had now been told to finish this cure with a thorough rest in the country air. The thin lady asked her the name of her doctor, and before ascertaining what was the disease in question, recommended another doctor who had cured a friend of hers, almost as though by miracle, of heart disease. The large lady seemed interested and wrote down the direction of the marvellous physician. She was herself suffering, she said, from a

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nervous illness, and her daughter had St. Vitus's dance. They were so far quite satisfied with their doctor. They talked for some time exclusively about medical matters, comparing notes about doctors, diseases, and remedies. The thin lady said she had been cured of all her ills by aspirin and cinnamon.

In the course of the conversation the stout lady mentioned her husband, who, it turned out, was the head of the gendarmerie in a town in Siberia, not far from Irkutsk. This seemed to interest the thin lady immensely. She at once asked what were his political views, and what she herself thought about politics.

The large lady seemed to be reluctant to talk politics and evaded the questions for some time, but after much desultory conversation, which always came back to the same point, she said :

“ My husband is a Conservative ; they call him a ‘ Black-Gang ’ man, but it's most unfair and untrue, because he is a very good man and very just. He has his own opinions and he is sincere. He does not believe in the Revolution or in the Revolutionaries. He took the oath to serve the Emperor when everything went quietly and well, and now, although I have often begged him to leave the Service, he says it would be wrong to leave just because it is dangerous. ‘ I have taken the oath,’ he says, ‘ and I must keep it.’ ”

Here she stopped, but after some further questions on the part of the thin lady, she said, “ I never had time or leisure to think of these questions. I was married when I was sixteen. I have had eight children, and they all died one after the other except this one, who was the eldest. I used to see political exiles and prisoners, and I used to feel sympathy for them. I used to hear about people being sent here and there, and sometimes I used

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to go down on my knees to my husband to do what he could for them, but I never thought about there being any particular idea at the back of all this." Then after a short pause she added, "It first dawned on me at Moscow. It was after the big strike, and I was on my way home. I had been staying with some friends in the country, and I happened by chance to see the funeral of that man Bauman, the doctor, who was killed. I was very much impressed when I saw that huge procession go past, all the men singing the funeral march, and I understood that Bauman himself had nothing to do with it. Who cared about Bauman? But I understood that he was a symbol. I saw that there must be a big idea which moves all these people to give up everything, to go to prison, to kill, and be killed. I understood this for the first time at that funeral. I cried when the crowd went past. I understood there was a big idea, a great cause behind it all. Then I went home.

"There were disorders in Siberia: you know in Siberia we are much freer than you are. There is only one society. The officials, the political people, revolutionaries, exiles, everybody, in fact, all meet constantly. I used to go to political meetings, and to see and talk with the Liberal and Revolutionary leaders. Then I began to be disappointed because what had always struck me as unjust was that one man, just because he happened to be, say, Ivan Pavlovitch, should be able to rule over another man who happened to be, say, Ivan Ivanovitch. And now that these Republics were being made, it seemed that the same thing was beginning all over again—that all the places of authority were being seized and dealt out amongst another lot of people who were behaving exactly like those who had authority before. The arbitrary authority was there just the same, only it had changed

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hands, and this puzzled me very much, and I began to ask myself, ‘ Where is the truth ? ’ ”

“ What did your husband think ? ” asked the thin lady.

“ My husband did not like to talk about these things,” she answered. “ He says, ‘ I am a Government servant, and I must serve. It is not my business to have opinions.’ ”

“ But all those Republics didn’t last very long,” rejoined the thin lady.

“ No,” continued the other ; “ we never had a Republic, and after a time they arrested the chief agitator, who was the soul of the Revolutionary movement in our town, a wonderful orator. I had heard him speak several times and been carried away. When he was arrested I saw him taken to prison, and he said ‘ Good-bye ’ to the people, and bowed to them in the street in such an exaggerated theatrical way that I was astonished and felt uncomfortable. Here, I thought, is a man who can sacrifice himself for an idea, and who seemed to be thoroughly sincere, and yet he behaves theatrically and poses as if he were not sincere. I felt more puzzled than ever, and I asked my husband to let me go and see him in prison. I thought that perhaps after talking to him I could solve the riddle, and find out once for all who was right and who was wrong. My husband let me go, and I was admitted into his cell.

“ ‘ You know who I am,’ I said, ‘ since I am here, and I am admitted inside these locked doors ? ’ He nodded. Then I asked him whether I could be of any use to him. He said that he had all that he wanted ; and like this the ice was broken, and I asked him presently if he believed in the whole movement. He said that until the 17th of October, when the Manifesto had been issued, he had believed with all his soul in it ; but

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the events of the last months had caused him to change his mind. He now thought that the work of his party, and, in fact, the whole movement, which had been going on for over fifty years, had really been in vain. 'We shall have,' he said, 'to begin again from the very beginning, because the Russian people are not ready for us yet, and probably another fifty years will have to go by before they are ready.'

"I left him very much perplexed. He was set free not long afterwards, in virtue of some manifesto, and because there had been no disorders in our town and he had not been the cause of any bloodshed. Soon after he came out of prison my husband met him, and he said to my husband, 'I suppose you will not shake hands with me?' And my husband replied, 'Because our views are different there is no reason why both of us should not be honest men,' and he shook hands with him."

The conversation now became a discussion about the various ideals of various people and parties holding different political views. The large lady kept on expressing the puzzled state of mind in which she was.

The whole conversation, of which I have given a very condensed report, was spread over a long time, and often interrupted. Later they reached the subject of political assassination, and the large lady said :

"About two months after I came home that year, one day when I was out driving with my daughter in a sledge the Revolutionaries fired six shots at us from revolvers. We were not hit, but one bullet went through the coachman's cap. Ever since then I have had nervous fits and my daughter has had St. Vitus's dance. We have to go to Moscow every year to be treated. And it is so difficult. I don't know how to manage. When I am at

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home I feel as if I ought to go, and when I am away I never have a moment's peace, because I cannot help thinking the whole time that my husband is in danger. A few weeks after they shot at us I met some of the Revolutionary party at a meeting, and I asked one of them why they had shot at me and my daughter. I could have understood it if they had shot at my husband. But why at us ? He said, ' When the wood is cut down, the chips fly about.' ¹ And now I don't know what to think about it all.

“ Sometimes I think it is all a mistake, and I feel that the Revolutionaries are posing and playing a part, and that so soon as they get the upper hand they will be as bad as what we have now ; and then I say to myself, all the same they are acting in a cause, and it is a great cause, and they are working for liberty and for the people. And, then, would the people be better off if they had their way ? The more I think of it the more puzzled I am. Who is right ? Is my husband right ? Are they right ? Is it a great cause ? How can they be wrong if they are imprisoned and killed for what they believe ? Where is the truth, and what is truth ? ”

¹ A Russian proverb.

A POLICE OFFICER

IT was the fourth day of the armed rising in Moscow. Early in the morning some of the shops had opened, especially the tobacconists, and there had been a certain amount of movement in the streets ; but later on, towards noon, a stillness had again descended on the city. From the centre of the town came the noise of artillery, and in the side streets one heard a ceaseless clicking of firing, though one could not tell whence it came or where it was going on.

At half-past six in the evening, when Alexander Petrovitch Pavlov, a police officer, went home to dinner, all the city seemed empty, quiet and deserted, yet at the same time full of an intermittent, unwonted noise. He went down the Square from the Governor's house where he had had business, past the Hotel Dresden, and stopped to say a few words to the policeman there on duty. The policeman, in reply to some question he had vaguely asked (for Alexander Petrovitch was tired, sick of the whole business and discouraged by what seemed to him to be a tissue of absurdities), said, " They are fools, little fools—nothing will come of it." He did not pay much attention to this ; he was thinking how absurd the whole matter was, and what a nuisance these abnormal upheavings were when they were prolonged.

Alexander Petrovitch was a man about forty years of age. He had been an officer in an infantry regiment, and had once been a man of considerable means, but he had lost all his money quite suddenly, playing cards.

A POLICE OFFICER

He had been fond of adventure, and had even taken part in foreign wars in Cuba, in Greece, and in China. Then he married. He did this as he had done everything else, suddenly and impulsively. He married the daughter of a landowner whom he met in a provincial town, and he married her after three days' acquaintance. His wife was good-looking and prided herself on her European culture ; she spoke French and English. They had two children. It was after his marriage that he had lost his money, and shortly before the war. When the war broke out he went to Manchuria. He was wounded at the battle of Mukden and promoted to be a captain ; he also received two orders. After Mukden he was invalided home, and some influential person who had met him in the Far East obtained for him a place in the police at Moscow, for which he received good pay. He was what is called in Russian a " *Pristav* " ; that is to say, the police officer of a town district. His wife considered that this position was an inferior one ; she was humiliated by it. She also considered her husband to be beneath her in social rank (which was in reality absurd), and she constantly reminded him of the fact. Alexander Petrovitch was quick-witted, good-natured, impulsive, but hopelessly incapable of any prolonged effort or any sort of concentration or fixity of purpose. His mind continually went off at a tangent, and as a Russian proverb says, " There was no Tsar in his head."

When the Manifesto of the 17th of October had been published he had greeted it with enthusiasm, and had taken part in the processions which had filled the streets that day, and the crowds that sang the " *Marseillaise* " and " God save the Emperor," alternately, and displayed together the Red and the National flag. But now he was discouraged. His innate scepticism and his pessimism,

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which every now and then gave way to fitful outbursts of enthusiasm, had once more got the upper hand, and he muttered as he walked home through the snowy streets on that grey evening, "What a beastly state of things ! What a beastly state of things !"

When he got home he saw at a glance that his wife was not in the best of tempers.

"Late as usual !" she said. "The soup's been standing twenty minutes and it's quite cold."

"I'm very sorry," he said ; "I was kept at the Governor's." He sat down to the table on which there were a few sardines in a broken saucer, a little stale pickled caviare which had got hard and slightly grey, and some slices of cold sausage no longer fresh. He gulped down three small glasses of vodka.

"What about Ermolov ?" asked his wife.

"He has been arrested," said Alexander Petrovitch. "He will be examined by the doctors."

"What nonsense !" said his wife. "Why should he be examined ? Why should he be arrested ? I think he ought to be rewarded. They don't care who they kill ; they shoot policemen round the corner ; they profit by the red cross uniform to kill the police ; they were shooting from some of the churches to-day."

Ermolov was a high police official who had walked into a doctor's house the day before and had shot him with a pistol for no reason at all.

Alexander Petrovitch shrugged his shoulders. "It's the Government's fault," he said. "There is no order and no law anywhere. Influence is everything. What does it matter what the Revolutionaries do ? That has nothing to do with the question. If an officer breaks the law he ought to be punished. He won't be punished because he's got influence. Besides which,

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Ermolov is not a normal man : he is mad, quite mad."

"What I say is," said his wife, "that men who pretend to be doctors and use the protection of the red cross badges to shoot innocent policemen in the streets, ought to be shot in the street at sight."

"The whole thing is absurd !" said Alexander Petrovitch.

"What did I tell you ?" said his wife ; "I told you so from the very first when the Manifesto was published. I said that nothing would come of it, and that it was a mistake. What do we want with a Constitution in Russia ? It is all the Jews—all this chaos is the work of the Jews. And look what is happening now. One cannot even go out into the streets for fear of being shot. They killed the Schwetzar (the hall porter) next door this morning ; he had been sent on a message."

"If people would stay at home and mind their own business," said Alexander Petrovitch, "they would be quite safe. All day long I have been pestered by people who want to pass here and want to pass there ; and they know quite well they can't. And it's no good telling them 'Don't go there, it's dangerous ; don't go there, you'll be shot,' because the moment you tell them that, they make a point of going there at once. I'm sick of always saying the same thing. If they go out in the streets they must expect to be killed."

"These students and these Jews," said his wife, "come and shoot you round the corner. I always said this would be the end of it. I always said no good would come of it. It is disgraceful !"

Alexander Petrovitch settled down to his dinner, and, putting a napkin under his chin, began to eat the soup, but it was cold and he had no appetite.

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“Where are the children?” he said.

“They’ve had their dinner,” said his wife. “Kolia and Peter are reading in the next room.”

Alexander Petrovitch called his children, and two little boys came into the room. Kolia, a fair-haired, pasty-faced boy with large grey eyes, was aged nine, and Peter, a fat, dark-haired little creature in a sailor’s suit, was aged seven. Peter climbed on to his father’s knee, and his father asked him what he had been doing.

“We’ve been making bombs with the snow,” said Peter, “and playing at the Revolution. Kolia was a policeman and I was a Social Democrat, and I made a bomb and threw it at him and killed him.”

“How dare you play such games?” said their mother — “that’s all your fault,” she added to her husband; “it’s you who have put such ideas into their heads. Heaven knows when children begin to get such ideas; I think the end of the world is come. Look at our schools: the children can’t read; the universities are all in the hands of the Jews. The girls at school have all gone quite mad. Nothing but hysteria, hysteria, hysteria! It’s a disgrace. Don’t let me ever hear of your playing such games again,” she said to the children.

The children, used to perpetual scolding, said nothing. Alexander Petrovitch laughed.

“At least, I hope,” said his wife, “that the result of all this, and of your having to do all this extra work, will be that you will get promotion.”

“I doubt it,” said Alexander Petrovitch. “I have got no protection, and protection is everything. I have finished my dinner. I want some tea.”

His wife called Sasha, the maid, and told her to bring the samovar, and then scolded her violently because it was not ready. She then made a further scene about the way

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in which the lemon was cut. Finally the samovar was brought, Alexander Petrovitch was given his tea and began smoking cigarette after cigarette in gloomy silence. His wife sat at the head of the table and said nothing. The children played in the corner with some wooden soldiers, and every now and then a dull boom was heard outside, and once or twice the window shook and rattled.

"Guns!" said Alexander Petrovitch. "They are firing in the Tverskaia, I suppose."

At that moment the bell rang.

"I think," said Alexander Petrovitch's wife, "that it must be Ivan Ivanovitch; he said he would come round this evening if he could."

"I shall have to go presently," said Alexander Petrovitch; "I've got to go back to the office."

Then the door was opened, and seven or eight people walked into the room. They were young schoolboys and students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, and there were two girls with them.

Alexander Petrovitch and his wife were surprised at this influx of guests, and the children stood up in the corner and stared.

"Whom have I the honour to address and what can I do for you?" said Alexander Petrovitch.

A young student with long black hair, a seedy overcoat, and a worn fur cap appeared to be the spokesman of the group, and, taking off his cap, said, "We are the representatives of the flying column of the Social Revolutionaries. We have come to carry out our orders."

Alexander Petrovitch's wife stood up and turned pale. The schoolboys and the students surrounded Alexander Petrovitch and, linking their arms in his, forced him out of the room. He turned round and looked at his wife

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and the children. " I thought as much ! " he said. Then he was pushed out of the room and down the staircase.

All this happened in a moment. His wife stood still as though transfixed, and could not move or utter.

Two or three minutes passed in breathless silence, and Peter began to cry. They had left the door open. The banging of the street door was heard, and then two or three shots rang out.

Sasha, the maid, came rushing into the room, screaming with all her might :

" They have killed Alexander Petrovitch in the yard ! "

RUSSALKA

PETER, or Petrushka, which was the name he was known by, was the carpenter's mate ; his hair was like light straw, and his eyes were mild and blue. He was good at his trade ; a quiet and sober youth ; thoughtful, too, for he knew how to read and had read several books when he was still a boy. A translation of *Monte Cristo* once fell into his hands, and this story had kindled his imagination and stirred in him the desire to travel, to see new countries and strange people. He had made up his mind to leave the village and to try his luck in one of the big towns, when, before he was eighteen, something happened to him which entirely changed the colour of his thoughts and the range of his desires. It was an ordinary experience enough : he fell in love. He fell in love with Tatiana, who worked in the starch factory. Tatiana's eyes were grey, her complexion was white, her features small and delicate, and her hair a beautiful dark brown with gold lights and black shadows in it ; her movements were quick and her glance keen ; she was like a swallow.

It happened when the snows melted and the meadows were flooded ; the first fine day in April. The larks were singing over the plains, which were beginning to show themselves once more under the melting snow ; the sun shone on the large patches of water, and turned the flooded meadows in the valley into a fantastic vision. It was on a Sunday after church that this new thing happened. He had often seen Tatiana before : that day

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she was different and new to him. It was as if a bandage had been taken from his eyes, and at the same moment he realised that Tatiana was a new Tatiana. He also knew that the old world in which he had lived hitherto had crumbled to pieces ; and that a new world, far brighter and more wonderful, had been created for him. As for Tatiana, she loved him at once. There was no delay, no hesitation, no misunderstanding, no doubt : and at the first not much speech ; but first love came to them straight and swift, with the first sunshine of the spring, as it does to the birds.

All the spring and summer they kept company and walked out together in the evenings. When the snows entirely melted and the true spring came, it came with a rush ; in a fortnight's time all the trees except the ash were green, and the bees boomed round the thick clusters of pear-blossom and apple-blossom, which shone like snow against the bright azure. During that time Petrushka and Tatiana walked in the apple orchard in the evening and they talked to each other in the divinest of all languages, the language of first love, which is no language at all but a confused medley and murmur of broken phrases, whisperings, twitterings, pauses, and silences—a language so wonderful that it cannot be put down into speech or words, although Shakespeare and the very great poets translate the spirit of it into music, and the great musicians catch the echo of it in their song. Then a fortnight later, when the woods were carpeted and thick with lilies of the valley, Petrushka and Tatiana walked in the woods and picked the last white violets, and later again they sought the alleys of the landlord's property, where the lilac bushes were in blossom and fragrant, and there they listened to the nightingale, the bird of spring. Then came the summer, the fragrance

RUSSALKA

of the beanfields, and the ripening of corn and the wonderful long twilights, and July, when the corn, ripe and tall and stiff, changed the plains into a vast rippling ocean of gold.

After the harvest, at the very beginning of autumn, they were to be married. There had been a slight difficulty about money. Tatiana's father had insisted that Petrushka should produce a certain not very large sum ; but the difficulty had been overcome and the money had been found. There were no more obstacles, everything was smooth and settled. Petrushka no longer thought of travels in foreign lands ; he had forgotten the old dreams which *Monte Cristo* had once kindled in him.

It was in the middle of August that the carpenter received instructions from the landowner to make some wooden steps and a small raft and to fix them up on the banks of the river for the convenience of bathers. It did not take the carpenter and Petrushka long to make these things, and one afternoon Petrushka drove down to the river to fix them in their place. The river was broad, the banks were wooded with willow trees, and the undergrowth was thick, for the woods reached to the river bank, which was flat, but which ended sheer above the water over a slope of mud and roots, so that a bather needed steps or a raft or a springboard, so as to dive or to enter and leave the water with comfort.

Petrushka put the steps in their place—which was where the wood ended—and made fast the floating raft to them. Not far from the bank the ground was marshy and the spot was suspected by some people of being haunted by malaria. It was a still, sultry day. The river was like oil, the sky clouded but not entirely overclouded, and among the high banks of grey cloud there were patches of blue.

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When Petrushka had finished his job, he sat on the wooden steps, and rolling some tobacco into a primitive cigarette, contemplated the grey, oily water and the willow trees. It was too late in the year, he thought, to make a bathing-place. He dipped his hand in the water : it was cold, but not too cold. Yet in a fortnight's time it would not be pleasant to bathe. However, people had their whims, and he mused on the scheme of the universe which ordained that certain people should have whims, and that others should humour those whims whether they liked it or not. Many people—many of his fellow-workers—talked of the day when the universal levelling would take place and when all men could be equal. Petrushka did not much believe in the advent of that day ; he was not quite sure whether he ardently desired it ; in any case, he was happy as he was.

At that moment he heard two sharp, short sounds, less musical than a pipe and not so loud or harsh as a scream. He looked up. A kingfisher had flown across the oily water. Petrushka shouted ; and the kingfisher skimmed over the water once more and disappeared in the trees on the other side of the river. Petrushka rolled and lit another cigarette. Presently he heard the two sharp sounds once more, and the kingfisher darted again across the water : a piece of fish was in its beak. It disappeared into the bank of the river on the same side on which Petrushka was sitting, only lower down.

" Its nest must be there," thought Petrushka, and he remembered that he had heard it said that no one had ever been able to carry off a kingfisher's nest intact. Why should he not be the first person to do so ? He was skilful with his fingers, his touch was sure and light. It was evidently a carpenter's job, and few carpenters had the leisure or opportunity to look for kingfishers' nests.

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What a rare present it would be for Tatiana—a whole kingfisher's nest with every bone in it intact.

He walked stealthily through the bushes down the bank of the river, making as little noise as possible. He thought he had marked the spot where the kingfisher had dived into the bank. As he walked, the undergrowth grew thicker and the path darker, for he had reached the wood, on the outskirts and end of which was the spot where he had made the steps. He walked on and on without thinking, oblivious of his surroundings, until he suddenly realised that he had gone too far. Moreover, he must have been walking for some time, for it was getting dark, or was it a thunder-shower? The air, too, was unbearably sultry; he stopped and wiped his forehead with a big print handkerchief. It was impossible to reach the bank from the place where he now stood, as he was separated from it by a wide ditch of stagnant water, so he retraced his footsteps through the wood. It grew darker and darker; it must be, he thought, the evening deepening and no storm.

All at once he started; he had heard a sound, a high pipe. Was it the kingfisher? He paused and listened. Distinctly, and not far off in the undergrowth, he heard a laugh, a woman's laugh. It flashed across his mind that it might be Tatiana, but it was not her laugh. Something rustled in the bushes to the left of him; he followed the rustling and it led him through the bushes—he had now passed the ditch—to the river bank. The sun had set behind the woods from which he had just emerged; the sky was as grey as the water, and there was no reflection of the sunset in the east. Except the water and the trees he saw nothing; there was not a sound to be heard, not a ripple on the river, not a whisper from the woods.

Then all at once the stillness was broken again by

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quick rippling laughter immediately behind him. He turned sharply round, and saw a woman in the bushes : her eyes were large and green and sad ; her hair straggling and dishevelled ; she was dressed in reeds and leaves ; she was very pale. She stared at him fixedly and smiled, showing gleaming teeth, and when she smiled there was no light nor laughter in her eyes, which remained sad and green and glazed like those of a drowned person. She laughed again and ran into the bushes. Petrushka ran after her, but although he was quite close to her he lost all trace of her immediately. It was as if she had vanished under the earth or into the air.

“ It’s a Russalka,” thought Petrushka, and he shivered. Then he added to himself, with the pride of the new scepticism he had learnt from the factory hands, “ There is no such thing ; only women believe in such things. It was some drunken woman.”

Petrushka walked quickly back to the edge of the wood, where he had left his cart, and drove home. The next day was Sunday, and Tatiana noticed that he was different—moody, melancholy, and absent-minded. She asked him what was the matter ; he said his head ached. Towards five o’clock he told her—they were standing outside her cottage—that he was obliged to go to the river to work.

“ To-day is holiday,” she said quietly.

“ I left something there yesterday : one of my tools. I must fetch it,” he explained.

Tatiana looked at him, and her intuition told her, firstly, that this was not true, and, secondly, that it was not well for Petrushka to go to the river. She begged him not to go. Petrushka laughed and said he would be back quickly. Tatiana cried, and implored him on her knees not to go. Then Petrushka grew irritable and almost

RUSSALKA

rough, and told her not to vex him with foolishness. Reluctantly and sadly she gave in at last.

Petrushka went to the river, and Tatiana watched him go with a heavy heart. She felt quite certain some disaster was about to happen.

At seven o'clock Petrushka had not yet returned, and he did not return that night. The next morning the carpenter and two others went to the river to look for him. They found his body in the shallow water, entangled in the ropes of the raft he had made. He had been drowned, no doubt, in setting the raft straight.

During all that Sunday night Tatiana had said no word, nor had she moved from her doorstep : it was only when they brought back the dripping body to the village that she stirred, and when she saw it she laughed a dreadful laugh, and the spirit went from her eyes, leaving a fixed stare.

THE FLUTE OF CHANG LIANG

THE village was called Moe-tung. It was on the edge of the big main road which leads from Liao-yang to Ta-shi-chiao. It consisted of a few baked mud-houses, a dilapidated temple, a well, a clump of willows, and a pond. One of the houses I knew well ; in its square open yard, in which the rude furniture of toil lay strewn about, I had halted more than once for my midday meal, when riding from Liao-yang to the south. I had been entertained there by the owner of the house, a brawny husbandman and his fat brown children, and they had given me eggs and Indian corn. Now it was empty ; the house was deserted ; the owner, his wife, and his children had all gone, to the city probably, to seek shelter. We occupied the house ; and the Cossacks at once made a fire with the front door and any fragments of wood they could find. The house was converted into a stable and a kitchen, and the officers' quarters were established in another smaller building across the road, on the edge of a great plain, which was bright green with the standing giant millet.

This smaller cottage had an uncultivated garden in front of it, and a kind of natural summer-house made by the twining of a pumpkin plant which spread its broad leaves over some stakes. We lay down to rest in this garden. About five miles to the north of us was the town of Liao-yang ; to the east in the distance was a range of pale blue hills, and immediately in front of us to the south, and scarcely a mile off, was the big hill of Sho-

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shan-tze. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and we had been on the move since two o'clock in the morning. The Cossacks brought us tea and pancakes, and presently news came from the town that the big battle would be fought the next day : the big battle, the real battle, which had been expected for so long and which had always been put off. There was a complete stillness everywhere. The officers unpacked their valises and their camp-beds. Every one arranged his bed and his goods in his chosen place, and it seemed as if we had merely begun once more to settle down for a further period of siesta in the long picnic which had been going on for the last two months. Nobody was convinced, in spite of the authentic news which we had received, that the Japanese would attack the next day.

The sunset faded into a twilight of delicious summer calm.

From the hills in the east came the noise of a few shots fired by the batteries there, and a captive balloon soared slowly, like a soap-bubble, into the eastern sky. I walked into the village ; here and there fires were burning, and I was attracted by the sight of the deserted temple in which the wooden painted gods were grinning, bereft of their priest and of their accustomed dues. I sat down on the mossy steps of the little wooden temple, and somewhere, either from one of the knolls hard by or from one of the houses, came the sound of a flute, or rather of some primitive wooden pipe, which repeated over and over again a monotonous and piercingly sad little tune. I wondered whether it was one of the soldiers playing, but I decided this could not be, as the tune was more Eastern than any Russian tune. On the other hand, it seemed strange that any Chinaman should be about. The tune continued to break the perfect

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stillness with its iterated sadness, and a vague recollection came into my mind of a Chinese legend or poem I had read long ago in London, about a flute-player called Chang Liang. But I could not bring my memory to work ; its tired wheels all seemed to be buzzing feebly in different directions, and my thoughts came like thistles down and seemed to elude all efforts of concentration. And so I capitulated utterly to my drowsiness, and fell asleep as I sat on the steps of the temple.

I thought I had been sleeping for a long time and had woken before the dawn : the earth was misty, although the moon was shining ; and I was no longer in the temple, but back once more at the edge of the plain. " They must have fetched me back while I slept," I thought to myself. But when I looked round I saw no trace of the officers, nor of the Cossacks, nor of the small house and the garden, and, stranger still, the millet had been reaped and the plain was covered with low stubble, and on it were pitched some curiously shaped tents, which I saw were guarded by soldiers. But these soldiers were Chinamen, and yet unlike any Chinamen I had ever seen ; for some of them carried halberds, the double-armed halberds of the period of Charles I., and others, halberds with a crescent on one side, like those which were used in the days of Henry VII. And I then noticed that a whole multitude of soldiers were lying asleep on the ground, armed with two-edged swords and bows and arrows. And their clothes seemed unfamiliar and brighter than the clothes which Chinese soldiers wear nowadays.

As I wondered what all this meant, a note of music came stealing through the night, and at first it seemed to be the same tune as I heard in the temple before I dropped off to sleep ; but presently I was sure that this was a mistake, for the sound was richer and more mellow, and

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like that of a bell, only of an enchanted bell, such as that which is fabled to sound beneath the ocean. And the music seemed to rise and fall, to grow clear and full, and just as it was floating nearer and nearer, it died away in a sigh: but as it died away the distant hills seemed to catch it and to send it back in the company of a thousand echoes, till the whole night was filled and trembling with an unearthly chorus. The sleeping soldiers gradually stirred and sat listening spellbound to the music. And in the eyes of the sentries, who were standing as motionless as bronze statues in front of the tents, I could see the tears glistening. And the whole of the sleeping army awoke from its slumber and listened to the strange sound. From the tents came men in glittering silks (the Generals, I supposed) and listened also. The soldiers looked at each other and said no word. And then all at once, as though obeying some silent word of command given by some unseen captain, one by one they walked away over the plain, leaving their tents behind them. They all marched off into the east, as if they were following the music into the heart of the hills, and soon, of all that great army which had been gathered together on the plain, not one man was left. Then the music changed and seemed to grow different and more familiar, and with a start I became aware that I had been asleep and dreaming, and that I was sitting on the temple steps once more in the twilight, and that not far off, round a fire, some soldiers were singing. It was a dream, and my sleep could not have been a long one, for it was still twilight and the darkness had not yet come.

Fully awake now, I remembered clearly the old legend which had haunted me, and had taken shape in my dream. It was that of an army which on the night before the battle had heard the flute of Chang Liang. By his playing

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he had brought before the rude soldiers the far-off scenes of their childhood, which they had not looked upon for years—the sights and the sounds of their homes, the faces and the spots which were familiar to them and dear. And they, as they heard this music, and felt these memories well up in their hearts, were seized with a longing and a desire for home so potent and so imperative that one by one they left the battlefield in silence, and when the enemy came at the dawn, they found the plain deserted and empty, for in one minute the flute of Chang Liang had stolen the hearts of eight thousand men.

And I felt certain that I had heard the flute of Chang Liang this night and that the soldiers had heard it too ; for now round a fire a group of them were listening to the song of one of their comrades, a man from the south, who was singing of the quiet waters of the Don, and of a Cossack who had come back to his native land after many days and found his true love wedded to another. I felt it was the flute of Chang Liang which had prompted the southerner to sing, and without doubt the men saw before them the great moon shining over the broad village street in the dark July and August nights, and heard the noise of dancing and song and the cheerful rhythmic accompaniment of the accordion. Or (if they came from the south) they saw the smiling thatched farms, whitewashed, or painted in light green distemper, with vines growing on their walls ; or again, they felt the smell of the beanfields in June, and saw in their minds' eye the panorama of the melting snows, when at a fairy touch the long winter is defeated, the meadows are flooded, and the trees seem to float about in the shining water like shapes summoned by a wizard. They saw these things and yearned towards them with all their hearts, here in this uncouth country where they were to fight a strange people for an

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unaccountable reason. But Chang Liang had played his flute to them in vain. It was in vain that he had tried to lure them back to their homes, and in vain that he had melted their hearts with the memories of their childhood. For the battle began at dawn the next morning, and when the enemy attacked they found an army there to meet them ; and the battle lasted for two days on this very spot ; and many of the men to whom Chang Liang had brought back through his flute the sights and the sounds of their childhood, were fated never to hear again those familiar sounds, nor to see the land and the faces which they loved.

CHUN WA

HIS name was Chun Wa. Possibly there was some more of it, but that is all I can remember. He was about four or five years old, and I made his acquaintance the day we arrived at the temple. It was at the end of September. We had left Mukden in order to take part in what they said was going to be a great battle. I don't know what the village was called at which we arrived on the second day of our march. I can only remember that it was a beautiful and deliciously quiet spot, and that we established ourselves in a temple ; that is to say, not actually in the temple itself, but in the house of the priest. He was a Buddhist who looked after the deities of the place, which were made of carved and painted wood, and lived in a small pagoda. The building consisted of three quadrangles surrounded by a high stone wall. The first of these quadrangles, which you entered from the road, reminded me of the yard in front of any farm. There was a good deal of straw lying about, some broken ploughshares, buckets, wooden bowls, spades, and other furniture of toil. A few hens hurried about searching for grains here and there ; a dog was sleeping in the sun. At the farther end of the yard a yellow cat seemed to have set aside a space for its exclusive use. This farmyard was separated from the next quadrangle by the house of the priest, which occupied the whole of the second enclosure ; that is to say, the living rooms extended right round the quadrangle, leaving a square and open space in the centre. The part of the house

CHUN WA

which separated the second quadrangle from the next consisted solely of a roof supported by pillars, making an open verandah, through which from the second enclosure you saw into the third. The third enclosure was a garden, consisting of a square grass plot and some cypress trees. At the farther end of the garden was the temple itself.

We arrived in the afternoon. We were met by an elderly man, the priest, who put the place at our disposal and established us in the rooms situated in the second quadrangle, to the east and west. He himself and his family lived in the part of the house which lay between the farmyard and the second enclosure. The Cossacks of the battery with which I was living encamped in a field on the other side of the farmyard, but the treasure-chest was placed in the farmyard itself, and a sentry stood beside it with a drawn sword.

The owner of the house had two sons. One of them, aged about thirteen, had something to do with the temple services, and wore a tunic made of white silk. The second was Chun Wa. It was when the sentry went on guard that we first made the acquaintance of Chun Wa. His cheeks were round and fat, and his face seemed to bulge out towards the base. His little eyes were soft and brown and twinkled like onyxes. His tiny little hands were most beautifully shaped, and this child moved about the farmyard with the dignity of an Emperor and the gravity of a great Pontiff. Quietly and without a smile he watched the Cossacks unharnessing their horses, lighting a fire, and arranging the officers' kit.

He walked up to the sentry who was standing near the treasure-chest, a big, grey-eyed Cossack with a great tuft of fair hair, and the expression of a faithful retriever, and, in a tone of indescribable contempt, Chun Wa said,

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“ Ping ! ” “ Ping ” in Chinese means soldier-man, and if you wish to express your contempt for a man there is no word in the whole of the Chinese language which expresses it so fully and so emphatically as the word “ Ping.”

The Cossack smiled on Chun Wa and called him by a long list of endearing diminutives, but Chun Wa took no notice, and retired into the inner part of the house as if he had determined to pay no more attention to the barbarous intruders. The next day, however, curiosity got the better of him, and he could not help inspecting the yard, and observing the doings of the foreign devils. And one of the Cossacks—his name was Lieskov and he looked after my mule—made friends with Chun Wa. He made friends with him by playing with the dog. The dog, like most Chinese dogs, was dirty, distrustful, and not used to being played with ; he slunk away if you called him, and if you took any notice of him he evidently expected to be beaten, kicked, or to have stones thrown at him. He was too thin to be eaten. But Lieskov tamed the dog and taught him how to play, and the big Cossack used to roll on the ground while the dog pretended to bite him, until Chun Wa forgot his dignity, his contempt, and his superior culture, and smiled. I remember coming home that very afternoon from a short stroll with one of the officers, and we found Lieskov lying fast asleep in the farmyard right across the steps of the door through which we wanted to go, and Chun Wa and the dog were sitting beside him. We woke him up and the officer asked him why he had gone to sleep.

“ I was playing with the dog, your honour,” he said, “ and I played so hard that I was exhausted and fell asleep.”

After that Chun Wa made friends with everybody,

CHUN WA

officers and men, and he ruled the battery like an autocrat. He ruled by charm and a thousand winning ways. But his special friend was Lieskov, who carried the child about on his back, performed many droll antics to amuse him, and taught him words of pidgin Russian. Among other things he made him a kite—a large and beautiful kite—out of an old piece of yellow silk, shaped like a butterfly. And Chun Wa's brother flew this kite with wonderful skill, so that it looked like a glittering golden bird soaring in the air.

I forget how long we stayed at this temple, whether it was three days or four days ; possibly it was not so long, but it seemed like many months, or rather it seemed at the same time very long and very short, like a pleasant dream. The weather was so soft and so fine, the sunshine so bright, the air so still, that had not the nights been chilly we should never have dreamt that it was autumn. It seemed rather as though the spring had been unburied and had returned to the earth by mistake. And all this time fighting was going on to the east of us. The battle of Sha-Ho had begun, but we were in the reserve, in what they called the deepest reserve, and we heard no sound of firing, neither did we receive any news of it. We seemed to be sheltered from the world in an island of dreamy lotus-eating ; and the only noise that reached us was the sound of the tinkling gongs of the temple. We lived a life of absolute indolence, getting up with the sun, eating, playing cards, strolling about on the plains where the millet had now been reaped, eating again and going to bed about nine o'clock in the evening. Our chief amusement was to talk with Chun Wa and to watch the way in which he treated the Cossacks, who had become his humble slaves. I am sure there was not one of the men who would not have died gladly for Chun Wa.

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One afternoon, just as we were finishing our midday meal, we received orders to start. We were no longer in the reserve ; we were needed farther on. Everything was packed up in a hurry, and by half-past two the whole battery was on the march, and we left the lovely calm temple, the cypress trees, the chiming gongs, and Chun Wa. The idyll was over, the reality was about to begin. As we left the place Chun Wa stood by the gate, dignified and grave as usual. In one hand he held his kite, and in the other a paper Lotus flower, and he gave this flower to Lieskov.

Next day we arrived at another village, and from there we were sent still farther on, to a place whence, from the hills, all the fighting that was going on in the centre of that big battle was visible. From half-past six in the morning until sunset the noise of the artillery never ceased, and all night long there was a rattle of rifle-firing. The troops which were in front drew each day nearer to us. Another two days passed ; the battery took part in the action, some of the men were killed, and some of the men and the officers were wounded, and we retreated to the River Sha-Ho. Then just as we thought a final retreat was about to take place, a retreat right back to Mukden, we recrossed the river, took part in another action, and then a great stillness came. The battle was practically over. The advance of the enemy had ceased, and we were ordered to go to a certain place.

We started, and on our way we passed through the village where we had lived before the battle began. The place was scarcely recognisable. It was quite deserted ; some of the houses looked like empty shells or husks, as though the place had suffered from earthquake. A dead horse lay across the road just outside the farmyard.

One of the officers and myself had the curiosity to go

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into the temple buildings where we had enjoyed such pleasant days. They were deserted. Part of the inner courtyard was all scorched and crumbled as if there had been a fire. The straw was still lying about in the yard, and the implements of toil. The actual temple itself at the end of the grassy plot remained untouched, and the grinning gods inside it were intact ; but the dwelling-rooms of our host were destroyed, and the rooms where we had lived ourselves were a mass of broken fragments, rubbish, and dust. The place had evidently been heavily shelled. There was not a trace of any human being, save that in the only room which remained undestroyed, on the matting of the hard *Khang*—that is the divan which stretches like a platform across three-quarters of every Chinese room—lay the dead body of a Chinese coolie. The dog, the cat, and the hens had all gone.

We only remained a moment or two in the place, and as we left it the officer pulled my sleeve and pointed to a heap of rubbish near the gate. There, amidst some broken furniture, a mass of refuse, burned and splintered wood, lay the tattered remains of a golden kite.

PART II
OTHER STORIES

“ HABENT SUA FATA LIBELLI ”

THE village of X.—where the Conference of Army Commanders was being held that winter's morning in 1917—was not one of the larger centres of troops and billets in Northern France. The Conference itself was to take place in the classroom of the small village school. There was no place in the house for the smaller fry and the A.D.C.'s to wait. Such of these as there were—and there were not many that day—sat inside the cars or walked about. I knew I had two hours or more to wait. I explored the village. There were no shops worth mentioning and no signs of military life. As I passed by one house I looked in at the window. An officer was typing at a table near the window. As I passed by he looked up and he beckoned me to come in. I walked into his room. He was evidently thirsting for human society. “ Come in and get warm,” he said.

He was a middle-aged man with grey eyes and an unmilitary stamp of countenance and shoulders.

While we were talking of the topics of the day I remembered that I had in my pocket a rather large sheaf of confidential notes which the General had told me to burn. I asked my host if I might use his fire, and soon the document was beginning to smoulder. I say *smoulder* because, although the fire was not a bad one, the flames were curiously slow in carrying out their work of destruction, and I had to poke the fire and every now and then to separate the sheets of obstinate paper.

“ What a long time,” I said, “ it takes to burn any-

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thing ; and yet they say the library of Alexandria was burnt in three days."

" If they say that," said my host, " they lie."

" I suppose," I said, " nobody knows anything about it."

" Well," he said, " I know all about it, as a matter of fact, because I burnt the library myself."

I thought the man was mad, but to humour him I asked him if he had done this in a former existence.

" No," he said, reading my thoughts, " I am not mad, and it was not in a former existence. If you like to listen to a long story, which you won't believe, I will tell you all about it."

I told him that I enjoyed listening, and that my capacity for belief was great.

" You won't believe it," he said—" and, mind you, I don't expect you to—but the story may interest you, and you may as well listen to it as discuss the probability of the war ever ending, which will only be tedious, as we have both heard all there is to say."

I begged him to tell me his story, and he began as follows :

" I won't bore you with the story of my life, but I must tell you a few points to make what happened later clear. Point one : I was educated at a public school and at a university—in fact, two universities, if you count Cambridge as a university. I got a First Class in Classical Mods. at Oxford, and then, like Calverley, I migrated to Cambridge, where I took up Oriental languages and dabbled in palæography, but I never took a degree. My university career came to an end owing to family reasons, which I needn't trouble you with, but it is important that you should know I got the Chancellor's Medal for Latin Verse—indeed, I could write both Latin verse and

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Greek verse with great facility, although I was not a scholar and never read seriously. Point two : After I left the university various things happened to me, ranging from being a clerk at the British Museum to a salesman in a bric-à-brac shop of antiquities. I was an expert at papyri, and I had a good eye for antiquities, especially for false antiquities. Do you remember the story of the Greek vase in Paris somewhere about the year 1899 ? No ? Well, a very fine Greek vase turned up in Paris which was said to have been stolen from a museum in the south of Italy.

“ All the experts of the Louvre, and many English experts, dealers, and scholars examined it, and they all pronounced it to be genuine. The director of the little museum in Italy was furious and said his vase was still there and perfectly genuine. The Paris vase, he said, was a forgery. The Louvre authorities were equally indignant and said they didn't make mistakes of that kind. My employers sent me over from London to see it. I saw it, and I tried a certain experiment on the bottom of it with a penknife, and reported it to be a forgery. Soon after, the Italian youth who had made the vase turned up and asked for money. The whole story crept into the newspapers, and so did my name ; but somehow or other I got the credit, not of having discovered the vase was a forgery, but of having forged the vase myself, and this proved the ruin and the end of my career as a seller of antiquities. The public fought shy of our establishment, and very soon the shop had to be closed.

“ Then, as a friend of mine put it, another revolution took place in my disgraceful career. I was looking out for a job, but my experience, which was varied, and my knowledge, which, though limited, was peculiar and exotic, were just the kind of assets that nobody seemed to

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want. However, fortune favoured me in the shape of a Franco-American millionaire who wanted to found an empire somewhere in the deserts of North Africa.

“ He had already spent a great deal of money in wants of this description, and five minutes' conversation with him convinced me that his latest whim would be expensive and shortlived. He was on the look out for a Minister of Foreign Affairs, a commander-in-chief, and a private secretary. He engaged me as private secretary, with a handsome salary, solely on the strength of my knowledge of faked Greek and Roman antiquities. His Foreign Minister was a man who had failed to pass the examination for an interpretership, although he certainly spoke eight European and several Oriental languages, not counting dialects, because, unfortunately, he couldn't spell English. Charlemagne Caryll—for such was the millionaire's name, and he claimed descent from his illustrious namesake—could not find a commander-in-chief to his taste in Europe, and he put off doing so till we got to Algiers. There he found exactly what he wanted—a Russian called—it wasn't his real name—Dimitri Ivanov, who had served for five years in the French Foreign Legion. Ivanov was engaged immediately. So were two hundred native soldiers and a host of camels, and we started for Heaven knows where. I soon made friends with Ivanov. He was an astonishing person, and his story was far more interesting and extraordinary than the one I am telling you now, but there isn't time for it to-day, and I will tell it to you next time there is a Conference here. Suffice it to say that the expedition wouldn't have lasted twenty-four hours without him. He had started life as an officer in a good cavalry regiment, and he had spent five years as a convict at Saghalien for shooting a money-lender.

“ We left Biskra in September, but our final mobilisa-

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tion base was the oasis of Sedrata, not far from Ouargla, which we left at the beginning of October, and before the end of November we reached a place called Timassanin, which is an oasis : I am giving you false names on purpose.

“ By the time we had reached this cultivated spot many things had become plain. Firstly, that Caryll had given up all idea of founding an empire and a dynasty in the remoter parts of Africa. The scheme was now called an exploration expedition in the interests of science. It was, moreover, quite clear both to Ivanov and to myself that Caryll and Haverley, who was to have been the Foreign Minister, hated the desert, camp life, natives, and everything that Africa has to offer. Caryll was, in fact, longing to go home, but did not like to say so. Ivanov, on the other hand, who had never seriously thought for one moment of the empire, was a born explorer and traveller, and was bent, so he said then, on reaching the Congo. The matter was decided for us by Caryll falling sick. It was settled that he and Haverley would go back to Biskra. Ivanov and I were to proceed with the expedition. Caryll was only too glad to be its patron and financier. He arranged to join us in his steam yacht at Lagos and await our arrival there in a year's time from the following June. This, it was thought, was the shortest possible time in which we could accomplish the journey.

“ Then, to their inexpressible relief, Caryll and Haverley said good-bye to us and to the desert. I never set eyes on either of them again. The day after Charlemagne Caryll left us, we struck our camp and resumed our journey. It was at the end of our first day's march that I made the startling discovery that Ivanov had no intention of making the Congo his objective. Instead of marching south we were to go east. There was a particular tribe he was after, and the remains of a civilisation which he said had

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never been discovered. I told him frankly that I had no desire to play the part of Greek chorus in a Rider Haggard adventure, and suggested I had better leave him and go back to Biskra. He then said that my services would be indispensable to him, and he vowed he would make my fortune.

“ Before consenting to go on with him I insisted on knowing more, and he then revealed to me the scheme that was at the back of his mind. Ivanov, I have already told you, was an extraordinary man. His mental equipment and the nature of his culture were as extraordinary as his character. He spoke four or five European languages, Arabic, and many native dialects, but he knew next to no Latin and no Greek. He was a mathematician, and seemed to know something of every science and almost every trade. He had an inventor's mind and the eye of an engineer, and was astonishingly ingenious both in devising expedients and in carrying them out practically. Well, this was his idea. During his adventurous life he had come across many African travellers and had mixed and made friends with strange tribes, and had taken part himself in many hazardous and difficult expeditions. During all his travels in North Africa he had at many times and in various places come across a tradition of a host of camels travelling in remote times from Alexandria, bearing loads of precious objects across the desert to some spot in the west. This exodus he presumed to have taken place after the conquest of Alexandria by the Saracens, and his theory was that the precious burdens which were taken on camels from Alexandria were nothing less than the more valuable portions of the famous library which were saved by the zeal of a scholar from the fate appointed to them by the Caliph or by whoever was responsible for their destruction.

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“ ‘ I expect,’ Ivanov told me, ‘ he let the huge mass of writing which had accumulated over the Arian and Monophysite controversy burn, so the Caliph was satisfied that something was being burnt, and that he saved the classics.’

“ Ivanov maintained that he had come across this tradition over and over again, and that other travellers and explorers whom he had known had told him the same thing ; among others, Richard Burton, who had discussed the theory of the salvage of the library with him and had thought it quite possible.

“ Ivanov said he now knew where to look for the place, and that he intended to go down to history as the saviour of the library, and Caryll, he said, would have the credit of having made the expedition possible. I asked him how he knew, but he put me off by saying that he would tell me all that later.

“ Then followed weeks of monotonous and weary desert travelling, devoid of adventure or of any startling incident ; and after a time, which seemed to me an eternity, during which we had travelled several hundred miles, we reached a cultivated country once more : trees, mountains, and a river. We gathered that we were in the territory of a tribe called *Tebbi*, and that we were near their chief city, which I will call *Khem*.

“ The Touaregs who had accompanied us said that these *Tebbi* were Touaregs, although they did not speak Touareg, but another dialect which was a *lingua franca* in those parts. They were a black people with finely cut features, not all the same type as the niggers of the Soudan. They welcomed us in the most friendly fashion, and we were invited to the city of *Khem*, which turned out to be a small village. *Khem*, Ivanov said, was our destination ; and when I asked where the remnants

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of the fallen civilisation were to be found, he laughed and said that there never had been any civilisation, but that we would find the library all the same.

"We established ourselves at Khem, and Ivanov soon got on the friendliest terms with the natives. The Tebbi had a passion for talismans and wore dozens of them sewn up in little black leather bags or sealed in small tin cases on their bracelets, belts, bridles, and bows. Ivanov put this taste of theirs to good use by inventing talismans for them and demonstrating their efficacy.

"After we had been there a week or so, without anything of interest happening, Ivanov announced to me one morning that the local chief, whose name was Mara, was going to do us the signal honour of taking us to see the Talisman-in-Chief of the locality. He was kept in a sanctuary in a wood which was not far distant. We rode about three miles, and in the cutting of a thick forest we were taken down some steps into a large stone vault lit up with oil lamps. In the centre of the vault was a stone sarcophagus, and on the top of the sarcophagus a complete suit of green Jaeger cloth, a butterfly net, a stalking cap made of alpaca, and a collector's tin, besides various small objects such as a flask and a cabin hold-all.

"This, Mara told us, was the biggest white man's ju-ju they had ever had, and was the most powerful talisman of the country. On being further questioned by Ivanov he said that the tomb contained the remains of the wisest of white men, who had arrived one day from nowhere, accompanied by only two natives, and had spent the rest of his life at Khem. His sole occupation had been, so Mara told us, the discovery and arrangement of bundles. Asked where the bundles were, he took us into a further and larger vault, and there, partly on shelves and partly in chests, were rolls and rolls of per-

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fectly preserved papyri, carefully arranged and sorted and docketed with neat German labels. The first label which caught my eye was under the letter ‘ A ’—*Aristoteles’ Werke*.

“ ‘ This,’ said Ivanov very calmly, as he looked at the papyri, ‘ is the cream of the library of Alexandria, and a kind and industrious German has been here before us and catalogued the library with a card index.’ This, indeed, proved to be the case. Twenty years before our adventure began, a German professor had arrived there. His name was Engelmann. He had discovered the library and had spent his life in cataloguing it. As far as we could discover he had been treated by the natives with respect and veneration, and they had looked upon him as an almost supernatural being.

“ He had cured their sick and taught them all manner of things, and at his death his body had become the principal talisman of the tribe and the object of pilgrimage. The question which arose now was, what was to be done. Ivanov couldn’t read Greek or Latin, still less a papyrus, and I at once began a preliminary investigation. The treasures we found must, of course, have made up only a small part of the library, but perhaps the most valuable and interesting part of it. Here were the plays of Agathon, the complete works of Æschylus and Sophocles, lost plays of Euripides, the complete lyrics of Sappho and Alcæus, the *Margites* of Homer and innumerable lives of that poet and critical commentaries on his works, the poems of Calvus, some unguessed-of poems of Catullus, the lost books of Livy, and the remaining books of Euclid.

“ What we settled was this : I was to transcribe some of the most interesting specimens of the unknown works and to go back at once to Europe to interest the world in the matter, to get Caryll to organise a second and

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larger expedition, and to bring back an army of scribes and scholars. Ivanov was to remain behind.

“ I insisted on spending a month in investigating the library before starting, and I made some interesting discoveries, especially in the Homeric branch of literature, where I found that it was generally stated by the earliest Greek writers that the *Odyssey* was the work of Homer's youth and written after the *Margites* but long before the *Iliad*. Homer, in fact, was known throughout his life as the author of the *Odyssey*.

“ All Homer's works had been from the earliest times committed to writing, and the custom of reciting them was comparatively late. Every detail of Homer's life was known and his autobiography existed. The texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* agreed, as far as arrangement is concerned, with what we have. The plays of Æschylus, on the other hand, were infinitely fuller than our versions. The lost books of Euclid afforded interesting reading. They dealt with the theory of relativity, and were, so Ivanov said, far in advance of Einstein. One of the axioms was to the effect that parallel straight lines, if produced, meet immediately, and that two straight lines cannot avoid containing a space.

“ Of course there were some disappointments. The verse of Calvus read like efforts of modern scholars in the *Saturday Westminster*, nor could we find any trace or even mention of the works of Tacitus.

“ Well, I transcribed some interesting samples and set out again for Biskra with guides and a powerful escort. In less than six months' time I was in London. My first disappointment was to learn that Charlemagne Caryll was dead, and by a curious irony of fate he had left all his money to the foundation of a library in California. I corresponded with his executors, but they said they had

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all the classical works they wanted, and what they required were first editions of Conrad and Masefield, which they found difficulty in collecting.

“ I at once realised that if I simply told my story not a soul would believe it, so I started by sending some specimens of Calvus and Sappho to the *Literary Supplement of the Times*, without explaining how I had obtained the text. There was a correspondence—perhaps you remember it. The fragments I sent excited considerable interest *at first*. The scholars were of the opinion that the specimens of Sappho I sent were in the Lesbian dialect and the Sapphic metre, and some one went so far as saying that they might have been written by Alcæus, but the majority of the critics agreed in saying that they must be regarded as of uncertain origin—*fragmenta adespota*.

“ One of the editors of the *Rheinisches Museum* suggested some ingenious emendations to the already perfect text, and divided the poem into two parts, maintaining that there was an interval of many years, as was plain from internal evidence, between the composition of the two parts ; but just when the interest in the matter was really growing strong an authoritative professor wrote from Oxford pointing out that some of the words were not in the Æolic dialect at all, and that in the Greek poems ‘ the colour of the diction ’ was not that of Sappho. This was the first round of the dispute, and it left matters more or less as they were. The second round began by my sending to the *Literary Supplement* a poem by Calvus. This the scholars of England and Germany agreed in pronouncing to be an impudent forgery.

“ The incident of the Greek vase was recalled, and it was in vain that I said I had discovered that work to be a forgery, and had not forged it myself. The verses which

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had got me the Chancellor's Medal at Cambridge were produced, and scholars said it was clear that they were by the same hand as that which had produced the so-called 'discoveries,' and *The Times Literary Supplement* said that the correspondence must cease.

"It ended up with what was called a crushing rejoinder and thorough exposure by a celebrated scholar who triumphantly put the same question to me as Dr. Johnson put to Macpherson: 'Where are the originals?'

"It was time, the writer said, that this trifling should cease. I had only proved what I had already shown at college—that I had a happy knack of classical *pastiche*, and that had I taken the trouble I might have become a scholar, instead of which I had been guilty of criminal levity. I then appealed to people outside the literary world. I wrote to the *Daily Mail* and to *John Bull*. They did not even print the letters, so convinced were they that the thing was a spoof. I approached one or two people privately whom I thought it might interest. I soon saw that they thought that I was either mad or an unparalleled liar, so I gave this up. The only thing to do was to go back to Africa. I went back to Biskra and found Ivanov's men punctual to the rendezvous we had arranged. I made the journey a second time. When I told Ivanov the result of my efforts he laughed and said he was not surprised. 'They don't deserve to have the library, and I for one am not going to help them to have it,' he said. His attitude surprised me at first, but presently I found out that the fate of the library had gone out of his head. Two new matters engrossed him. Firstly, he had married the daughter of Mara, the chief—a beautiful black lady named Messadjibla; and, secondly, he had struck a supply of oil and had taught the natives how to bore for it.

"He had no intention, he said, of ever going back to

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Europe. Had not some one once said that the acme of human felicity was contained in the phrase, ‘ A library in a garden,’ and we had found the finest library in the world in the Garden of Eden? Not that he ever went near the library now.

“ Unfortunately Ivanov had made a third discovery, and this was that from the fruit of a local tree—a kind of black plum the size of an olive, called *Demenia*, which had a sweet taste and a slight after-taste of tallow and rancid butter—one could make a powerful and highly intoxicating liqueur.

“ This he carried out with the same energy and success that attended all his operations. But the first time Messadjibla found him almost insensible from drunkenness she gave him a sound beating, so that after this he confined his drinking to high days and holidays, as he was in mortal fear of his black spouse.

“ As for me, I was crushed with disappointment. At one time I dreamt of final triumph over the scholars of Europe by returning to England and publishing the complete works of Æschylus and Agathon, with notes to show how foolish the emendations of Berlin and Oxford looked in view of the correct text. But my real conviction was that it was hopeless to attempt anything. There was nothing to be done. One evening something happened which settled the matter: Ivanov invited Mara and all the notabilities of the place to a large *Tantam*—that is to say, a feast with dances, music, and a torchlight procession. The *Tantam* took place in the forest, near the vault which contained the library and not far from the petroleum wells.

“ Ivanov had already obtained quite a fine store of petroleum, which was kept in large stone jars in the first vault, where we found the tomb of the German professor.

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"During the entertainment Ivanov got riotously drunk, and he suggested that it would be a fine thing to make a sacrifice to the big talisman by burning the papyri, that the scholars of Europe did not deserve this library, and that I might thus have a fine revenge and punish them for their stupidity.

" 'If they won't let us give them the library,' he said, 'at least nobody else shall. They are capable of finding it later and claiming all the credit themselves. That, in any case, shall not happen.'

"I fell in with the idea, as no words can express the bitterness I felt after my treatment in England. Together we drenched the papyri with petroleum, and we explained to the natives that we were going to pay the highest possible honour to the sleeping Demigod. They were delighted. On that night the destruction of the library of Alexandria was begun. We burnt the best things first—Æschylus, Aristotle, Sappho, Alcæus, Homer and some illuminating history. As the flames of our bonfire leapt to the sky the dark natives howled with joy and danced round the bonfire and banged their shields, and beat tom-toms and yelled and stamped. It was a fine sight.

"One night's bonfire was only enough to burn a very little, and it took us a month to destroy the whole library. But the work of destruction was carried out to the end, and all that I kept were the specimens which had appeared in the London Press. I can show you these if you like. I have got them here. When the last papyrus was burnt, which happened to be the private diary of Julius Cæsar, I considered that my mission was accomplished, and I suggested going home; but Ivanov refused to budge. He said I could take any escort I liked, and do what I liked, and go where I liked; as for himself, he had found

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the place of his dreams and his heart's desire, and he was not such a fool as to regret civilisation. So I left him and came back to Europe, where I had to live down the reputation of being a de Rougemont. Fortunately, so watertight are the compartments of this world that in the sphere in which I next sought and found employment nobody had even heard of the library of Alexandria.”

At that moment I heard the impatient tootling of a motor-horn, and I knew that the Conference was over and that the General was waiting for me. I took hurried leave of my host.

“ You must take this,” he said, and he took from a dispatch-case two torn newspaper cuttings. They were a fragment of the specimens he had sent to the *Literary Supplement*. I never saw him again.

P.S.—These are the two fragments, one purporting to be by Sappho, the other by Calvus.

Αἰθ' ἐγώ, χρυσοστεφαν' Ἀφροδίτα,
τονδε τον παλον λαχονη, ὕμοια
σαισι φοιτισδοισα περιστεραισι
Κυπρον ἀμειβην·
αἶψα γαρ χειμων ἐτιναξεν ὕσδους,
ταισι δε ψυχρος μὲν ἐγεντο θυμός,
παρ δ' ἰεῖσι τα πτερα, καππεπαγα-
σιν δε νοημα
κουφον· ἀλλ' ἄπυ στυγερων ἀελλων
ἐκκαλησαισ' ἀθανατων ἐπεμψας
ὁμ βροδων ἐδρας, πεδεχην ἐραννας
δοισα Κυθηρας.

“ Pauper uterque, quibus non altera cura, parentes
Quintiliae inferias rettulimus cineri,
non vocem audituri iterum, nec verba venusta,
blaesiloquentis adhuc verba venusta tua.
qui tenerae placuere, sepulcro sternite flores :
forsitan hoc etiam gaudeat ipsa cinis.”

The first may be translated : “ Would that I, golden-

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crowned Aphrodite might win this lot, to migrate to Cyprus, journeying like thy doves ; for suddenly the storm has tossed the boughs and their heart has become chill, and they shed their feathers, and they are paralysed in their silly wits. But thou, calling them away from the hateful blasts, hast sent them among the abodes of roses undying, bidding them be partakers of delectable Cythera."

The second may run : " We her parents, poor in substance and having no other love in life, have paid the last rites to Quintilia's ashes, never again to hear that voice and those gay words—those gay words of yours, still lisping. Cast on her tomb the flowers her youth loved ; maybe her very ashes will take pleasure even in this."

THE ALTERNATIVE

I WAS reading history, and not for fun. I was reading for my schools. My third year at Balliol was drawing to an end, and I was expected to do well, and at the back of my dreams there was the hope of a fellowship and a quiet life in the security of Oxford.

I had been reading until late in the night. I was tired. I had been reading about Napoleon and the Russian Campaign of 1812. And now I had stopped reading and had fallen into an abstraction. I noticed that the time by the clock was 1.15. I was thinking of great men and the part they played in history, and to what extent events were modified by phenomena, such as Cæsar or Napoleon; as to whether they made a difference, or whether writers such as Tolstoi were right, who maintained that they made no difference. I thought of many things: of William James' *Essay on Great Men*, of Carlyle's *Heroes*, of Ferrero, of Mr. Wells' *Outline of History*. What would have happened, I said to myself, if Napoleon's father had sent his son into the British Navy, as he wanted to do at one moment, instead of into the French Army? Would everything have been different, or would everything have been exactly the same?

"Everything would have been different, but the result would have been just the same," said a voice at my elbow.

I looked up and saw sitting in the arm-chair which stood on the left of my writing-table a little old man. He was old and yet he did not look old. He was ageless. He had a thick head of hair, and you could not tell whether

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it was white or grey. His eyes were clear and luminous. There were no lines on his face. There were none of the usual signs of old age about him, and yet he gave the impression of immense old age, and of an almost infinite experience.

I did not feel in the least surprised at this sudden apparition. It seemed to me quite natural that this strange unaged old man should be sitting in my arm-chair. I did not even interrupt ; I merely waited for the old man to go on.

" Everything would have been different, but the result would have been the same," the stranger repeated. " You know how to play chess ? " he asked.

I said I was an enthusiastic but an unskilful chess player.

" Very well," said the stranger. " Supposing you play a game with a professional, you make certain mistakes, and you lose the game. Let us assume you keep a record of the moves, and that when the game is over your adversary allows you to play it over again. Say you rectify an initial blunder ; you use different openings, different gambits ; you have a new scheme, an improved strategical plan. Every move you make in this second game is different from those you made in the first game. But do you win ? No. Because your adversary, the professional, changes his game in such a manner as to meet and answer the changed nature of your game. He replies to your new strategy with a new counter-strategy ; his counter-moves lead you to move as he wishes, and in the end he checkmates you.

" So it is with men in history. Supposing you were to eliminate the great men of history, and substitute for them men of a different nature ; or supposing you left them as they were, but changed the quality of the moves

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and shortened or lengthened their careers inversely to what happened in history, as you know it ; then every move in the game would be different ; but, in spite of that, the march of history and the fate of mankind would be the same."

" I understand that's quite possible," I said, " but forgive the question, how do you know ? "

" Because," said the stranger, " I am the historiographer of the Kingdom of Limbo. I teach the ghosts history—*alternative history*, in case they should be conceited."

" Yes," I said, " but how I don't quite see. Films ? A cinematograph ? "

" Oh no," said the stranger. " We do better than that ; we plunge the student into the life of an alternative world ; alternative to the period in which he lived on earth ; and we let him learn from experience, as an eye-witness, what that epoch would have been like had his part been either non-existent or different."

" Very interesting," I said. " I should like a glimpse of an alternative world of that kind."

" Nothing is easier," said the stranger. " Choose any epoch you like and I will take you there."

" Well," I said, " I should like to see what would have happened in the period I am reading about, supposing Napoleon had entered the British Navy instead of the French Army."

" Nothing is easier," said the stranger. " You shall have two peeps into that world between 1800 and 1850. Come along."

I felt dazed for a moment, but only for a moment, and when I recovered from this fleeting flash of unconsciousness I found myself wide awake. I was sitting on a verandah ; in front of me was a seacoast, against

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which large grey breakers were rolling ; behind me sashed windows which reached to the ground opened on to a parlour ; and something touched a cell or struck a note in my memory which made me think of Miss Austen's novels, of *Cranford*, and of the breakfast-room in a country house where I had once stayed in my childhood. Was it a faint smell of lavender that came from indoors, or the taste of the saffron bun I had just eaten, for I had just taken a bite from a saffron bun, or the elder-flower wine that I was sipping, or the picture of King George on the wall I could see over the chimney-piece of the room beyond the verandah ? I don't know.

That parlour was bare, and might have belonged to almost any epoch. It was slightly damp. I knew that I was not in Europe, although there was nothing extra-European either behind or before me. I was talking to a man, who, although he was dressed in nankin, had something indefinably maritime about him. He was middle-aged, with a tawny beard streaked with grey hairs, and his face was tanned and worn by exposure ; there was nothing rough, bluff, or hearty about him, but, on the contrary, an air of gentle and slightly melancholy refinement. He was smoking a pipe, and after taking a puff or two in silence, he took up the thread of his discourse again. I was certain that the conversation was being continued and not being begun, and I felt quite satisfied when my quiet interlocutor said :

" Yes, that was her first cruise." It seemed the natural inevitable thing for him to say.

At that moment, a fat, sallow, dark-haired man dressed in nankin and wearing a broad panama hat strolled along the beach in front of us, whistling to himself a tune which I seemed to have heard before.

" Who's that ? " I asked.

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“That’s the Captain,” said my host. “He’s——”
He touched his forehead meaningly.

“Mad?” asked I.

“No, not mad, but queer,” said my host. “Has illusions—thinks he’s King of England one day, and Emperor of India the next. A curious career his as ever man had. His real name is Bonnypart, though he now goes by the name of Jackson, and his father, so they say, was an Italian skipper in one of the French colonial islands. He was anxious for his son to have a good education, so he sent him to England to be naturalised as an Englishman and to serve King George in the British Navy. The lad was partial to learning and took to the sea, like a duck takes to water, and all went well till the French Jacobites declared war on us a second time in 1805. He was already a Captain then, promotion in those times being speedy. He disobeyed orders, when the fleet was pursuing Admiral Villeneuve, and some say it was thanks to his breach of discipline that the fleet was not destroyed at Trafalgar. Be that as it may, the Admiralty had a black mark against his name from that moment, and he was warned that he had got off lightly the first time, owing to the victory and to Admiral Nelson’s intercession; Admiral Nelson saying that he had no use for the man who did not know how to disobey orders at the right moment (that did not please their Lordships). But shortly after the battle he was accused of cheating at cards, whether rightly or wrongly I don’t know, but I have seen men who have been shipmates with him, who said that never had they seen a man with a quicker brain for business and a slower head for cards; that there was no game he could master, and he cheated for very weariness, and neither for love of gain nor gambling. This time he was court-martialled, found

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guilty and dismissed from the service. Admiral Nelson could no longer intercede for him, for the Admiral himself had been superseded owing to the newspaper clamour which arose over his handling of the fleet at Trafalgar. Bonnypart changed his name to Jackson, and enlisted as a soldier in Wellesley's Army. He fought against the French Republic in Germany, and on the Eastern frontier against the Russians, and after a year or two he was given a commission. After the French Jacobites were defeated by the Germans and the Russians in 1814, he was once more promoted to the rank of Captain. This time he came into collision with Wellesley, now Lord Wellington. When the Allies occupied Paris, Lord W. declared he would go out fox-hunting in the Forest of Fontainebleau, and Captain Jackson, being a poor rider, and having foreign blood in him, and consequently no feeling for the sport, jeered openly at Wellington's intention. News of this got round to the General, who ordered Jackson to go out hunting with him the next day. Jackson did; but he shot the fox dead in the middle of a spanking run, and all but hit the General into the bargain. When he was had up before his Commanding Officer he answered with great insolence, and he was cashiered for insubordination. Being a restless fellow, he thought he would take service with the French or the Italians, and went to his old home, Sardinia or Elba. In 1815, when General Murat turned out the French King, Jackson enlisted in the French Navy, and the vessel he was in was captured not far from this island of St. Helena by a British frigate just before peace was made in 1815. He was imprisoned here as a deserter, and would have been tried for his life, but by this time, the illusions which some say had been simmering in him for a long time, aggravated by a blow on the head which

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he had received in the scrap at sea, got the better of him, and the doctors said he was not responsible for his actions. They kept him shut up in the hospital here at Longwood, but after a while the doctor, finding he was harmless, let him have the run of the island. Harmless he is, too, although there is a warder called Hudson who has an eye on him. You can see him now, behind that tree, some thirty yards behind the Captain. The Captain often stops to spin a yarn with me, and he is pleasant spoken and knowledgeable too about seamanship and the weather, and he has only one or two delusions. One is that he is King of England, and the other that he can play cribbage, which he cannot do without cheating, but we keep cards out of his way lest they should upset him.

“Would you like to speak with him?” said my host. “He is coming this way.”

I said I would be delighted to, and, as Captain Jackson walked towards the house where we were sitting, my host rose and beckoned to him.

Captain Jackson had a remarkable face, remarkable for its extreme pallor and for the brilliance of his penetrating eyes. He looked me up and down, and then asked in an abrupt way :

“Oxford or Cambridge?”

I felt embarrassed by his abruptness, but managed to get the word Oxford across my lips.

“What College?” he asked. “Balliol, I suppose,” and without waiting for an answer he said, “What are you studying?”

I said, “History.”

“Bah,” he said, “they can’t teach history at Oxford. There are only two places where you can learn history. One is the Navy and the other the Army, and then only in times of war.”

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Upon which, he took a pinch of snuff, turned his back, and walked quickly away.

Up to that moment, the conversation had seemed to me quite natural, as if I had belonged to the circumstances in which I suddenly found myself, as if I was a contemporary, taking part in the events of the day, but from the moment that Captain Jackson left us I seemed to be two people : the man who was on the island and who belonged to this remoter epoch, and my real twentieth-century self.

" Did Captain Jackson fight for Napoleon ? " I asked.

" Napoleon ? " said my host. " I never heard of him."

" The Emperor of the French," I said.

" There never was no Emperor as I ever heard of," said my host. " There was a King and they cut his head off. And then there was a Jacobite republic which overran half Europe, spreading revolution wherever it went, in Italy, Spain, Germany, and even in Russia. They won victories, then they were beat. As soon as all the world made peace, they made war again and won victories again, and at last they were beat altogether, and the King came into his own."

" Then who," I asked, " is King of France now ? "

" Why, Louis the Eighteenth, of course. And, thanks to those Jacobites, of a much smaller France than belonged to his ancestors. He had to give up Alsace and half Lorraine to the Germans."

His voice seemed to grow faint as he said this, and the scene melted. I rubbed my eyes and found that I was walking down a street, arm in arm with a stranger. I soon recognised the street. It was Whitehall.

" That," said the man who was walking with me, " is the Horse Guards."

I realised that I was being shown over London. I was

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possibly a stranger of distinction. My guide was floridly dressed. He wore a crimson necktie and a carbuncle pin, a yellow satin waistcoat, a large choker, a little imperial ; his eyes were bright and penetrating, his manner vivacious. There was something slightly histrionic about him.

I recognised certain familiar landmarks. The traffic, the hansom carriages, and the four-wheelers made a clatter in the street ; elegant barouches passed us. The ladies wore crinolines ; the men, Dundreary whiskers. I felt I had been landed into the world of Thackeray. We passed an unfamiliar statue which stood where the war memorial now stands.

“ Who is that ? ” I asked.

“ That,” said my guide, “ is the statue erected in memory of a poet who died fighting for the cause of royalty, order, and the Fleur-de-lys against the hosts of anarchy and murder in France during the great Jacobin War. He was killed fighting on the barricades in Paris. He showed great promise as a writer. His name was William Wordsworth.”

Just then we passed a dignified-looking old gentleman with white hair dressed in the fashion of an earlier period. He wore a blue swallow-tailed coat, a buff nankin waistcoat, and a fob with many seals hanging from it. He was a dignified and picturesque figure. He stooped slightly. His eyes were those of a mathematician or an inventor. There was an air of great distinction about him, not unmingled with a whiff of scholarship. I asked my guide who he was.

“ That,” he answered, “ is the Conservative Member for Horsham, Sir Percy Shelley.”

“ The son of the poet ? ” I asked.

“ Oh dear, no,” said my guide. “ His father was not a poet. His father was a Squire, Sir Timothy Shelley.

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It is true that Sir Percy did write some verse as a youth, but we never refer to that now. I assure you nobody ever refers to it. Boyish peccadilloes. Very regrettable, as they were atheistic, often heathen in tone, and sometimes even licentious in character. But boys will be boys, and the young must sow their wild oats. He has amply atoned for all that. Fortunately few of those early effusions were printed, and Sir Percy was able to withdraw from circulation and to destroy every single copy of that most deplorable doggerel. Sir Percy is one of the pillars of the Conservative Party, and the speech he made against Reform, and the Extension of Suffrage Bill, is a classic. He is a great patriot, is Sir Percy, and he wrote some stirring words about the war which were published in *The Times* newspaper, and then set to music and enjoyed a wide popularity.

“ The refrain ran :

‘ We don’t want to fight,
But Zeus help them if we do.’

You see, Sir Percy is a classical scholar and can never resist a Greek word. He never quotes Greek in the House, but Horace is always upon his lips. Horace, as he rightly says, is so quotable.”

“ Then he never writes now ? ” I asked.

“ He occasionally writes to *The Times* newspaper,” said my guide. “ You see,” he went on, “ he is a very busy man, Chairman of many Committees, and one of the most prominent Members of the Conservative Club, and on the Boards of I don’t know how many hospitals and charitable institutions. He plays a fair hand at whist, and always rides to the meet of the foxhounds if it is not too far off, and he is a sound and earnest Churchman——”

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“ Not a ritualist, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh no, not a ritualist, far from it. A sound, broad Churchman ; not too high, and not too low. He reads the lessons on Sunday at Horsham, with much expression and fervour, although his voice is a little shrill.”

“ Does he ever refer to his friendship with Lord Byron ? ” I asked.

“ They meet sometimes on State occasions.”

“ But isn’t Lord Byron dead ? ”

“ Dead ? Dear me, no, unless he died last night. I haven’t heard His Eminence was ill.”

“ I thought he died at Missolonghi in 1824.”

“ Oh no ; he returned from that Grecian expedition much shattered in health, and after a period of solitary reflection, which he spent in the Channel Islands, he joined the Church of Rome. He is now, of course, a Cardinal and lives at Birmingham.”

“ But his works ? ” I asked. “ Did he suppress them ? ”

“ Oh dear, no, sir. He wrote a great deal, and the last cantos of *Don Juan*, which tell of the Don’s conversion and *bona mors*, are reckoned to be among the most pious and edifying books of the century, by men of all religious denominations. He wrote, too, a fine sequel to *Cain*, called *The Death of Cain*, which is even more edifying, and even now he still writes hymns, some of which are popular both in the Roman, Anglican, and Evangelical Churches. Notably one which begins :

‘ The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold.’

But Cardinal Byron is better known now for his sermons than for his lyrics. He preaches most eloquently, and it is worth a journey to Birmingham to hear him.”

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"But who," I asked, "are the greatest contemporary poets?"

"Well," said my guide, "undoubtedly the greatest living poet is a woman: a portentous star of the first magnitude; I am talking of the fiery, volcanic, incandescent genius of Felicia Hemans, the author of that burning rhapsody *Casa Bianca*. She is undoubtedly the greatest woman poet since the days of Sappho, and perhaps even more passionate. We have just lost one great poet, James Montgomery. He was the greatest, in fact the only, epic poet since the days of Gray. Then there is Benjamin Disraeli, author of so many beautiful poetical dramas. Then you have the sombre and tortured broodings of Adelaide Proctor, and the fierce, bitter, biting etchings of Jean Ingelow; in fact, it is an age of poetesses more than of poets."

"And what about Alfred Tennyson?" I asked.

"The brother of the poet, Frederick?" said my guide. "Poor fellow, he was killed in the war a few months ago at Balaclava; a very gallant soldier."

"And the poet Keats?" I said. "Have you heard of him?"

"Of course," was the answer. "Who has not heard of him? It is impossible not to. He publishes a fresh volume of verse every year; but ever since he has lived at Torquay, where he originally settled down some thirty years ago, he has written practically nothing except about agriculture and crops and live stock. The hero of his last verse-narrative was a Shorthorn. He writes too much. All very instructive, of course, and parts of it are descriptive, but he writes a great deal too much. That's just what ruined Coleridge."

"But Coleridge is surely not alive?" I said.

"He died," I was informed, "two or three years ago."

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He was eighty years old. He died of overwork. He had just finished the last book of his epic: *Kubla Khan*. It has fifteen books, you will remember, and it is the longest epic in the English language. His one fear was that he should die before he should complete it. As it was, he finished it just six months before his death, and he had the joy of seeing the massive work in print. It is longer than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together, and the building of it occupied the whole of the poet's life."

"And did it meet with a satisfactory reception?" I asked.

"Most satisfactory. One critic in the *Quarterly Review* even went so far, it was perhaps a little extravagant on his part, as to put it in the same rank as Southey's immortal epics."

"Did Coleridge finish all his poems?" I asked.

My guide seemed quite offended by this question—offended for Coleridge and shocked at my ignorance.

"Of course he did," he said. "Coleridge was the most hard-working and conscientious of writers, and, as I have already told you, he died of overwork."

"But," I persisted, "did he ever finish *Christabel*?"

My guide smiled a superior tolerant smile.

"*Christabel*," he said, "is not by Coleridge at all. It is by De Quincey."

I gasped with astonishment.

"De Quincey, the opium eater?"

"He wrote several things of the same kind. *The Albatross* and *The Dark Lady*, all most fantastic stuff. Poor man, he was light-headed at the last. It came from taking drugs."

This account of the world of poetry so bewildered me that I thought I should feel on firmer ground if we passed

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to the domain of prose, and I asked who were considered the best novelists of the day.

"Well," said my guide, "there has been nothing very interesting in that way just lately. Mr. Thackeray has written a most insignificant story called *Vanity Fair*; all about those trumpery Jacobin Wars, which interest nobody now. Mr. Carlyle wrote a spirited romance some years ago which suffered from the same fault, namely, that of dealing with a hackneyed commonplace and dreary epoch: the Jacobin revolt. Indeed, Mr. Carlyle's work is the more tedious as it deals solely with France and with the French, and nobody now takes any interest in that country. There are, of course, a fine series of romances by Froude, and the powerful but rather morbid studies of real life by Miss Charlotte Yonge; the monumental history of Harrison Ainsworth; the fantastic short stories of Ruskin, and the almost too sprightly, too flippant satire and Puck-like wit of Herbert Spencer."

I asked whether the influence of the French was felt in recent literature. My guide said that the influence of French literature had been negligible. Ever since the restoration of the French monarchy, French literature had been pursuing an even but uninteresting course. During the prosperous and calm reign of Charles x., the most notable names in the literature of France were, as in England, nearly all those of women. There was Madame Desbordes Valmore, Mademoiselle Victor Hugo, Mademoiselle Lamartine, all of whom had written agreeable lyrics and some tuneful and melodious narrative poems. Among the male poets the most remarkable was Georges Sand. During the reign of Henry v. the same pure and refined standards had been upheld, but it could not be denied that this literature, although admirable in

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tone, sane in its outlook, and exemplary in the lessons which it taught, did not go down across the Channel. The England of Miss Yonge and Mrs. Gaskell—those unflinching realists, those intrepid divers into the unplumbed depths and mysteries of the human soul ; those undaunted and ruthless surgeons of all the secret sores of the spirit and of the flesh—was used to stronger meat, and insisted on getting it.

“ But,” I said, “ what about Musset and Baudelaire ? ”

My guide seemed astonished. “ Musset ? ” he said. “ I have never heard of a writer called Musset.”

“ Alfred de Musset,” I suggested.

“ There is a Secretary at the French Embassy here by that name, but as far as we know he has never written anything. As for Baudelaire, his hymns, psalms, and meditations are fervent and pious, and deserve respect, but they are so ultra-devotional and so full of technical theology and the jargon of the sacristy, that they would certainly find no public here. Cardinal Byron, it is true, admires them greatly, and has even published a translation of some of the hymns. No, we have little use for the goody-goody milk-and-water idealism here. All that would never go down in the country of Miss Austen.”

“ But,” I objected, “ surely Miss Austen was a great artist.”

“ Great, certainly, as great as the Pyramids, but *artist* is hardly the word. It is true she created a whole world, but she looked at the universe through the distorted lens of her lurid and monstrous imagination. She dipped her pen into the waters of Tartarus, so that she invests a page boy with the personality of a Hannibal, and lends Satanic proportions to the meanest of her rogues. Yet what she saw she described with such minute accuracy and with such wealth of detail, and abundance and even

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redundance of description, that the critics have almost universally acclaimed her as the founder of the great realistic-naturalistic English novel, whereas if they would only think more carefully they would see that Miss Austen is the last of the great romantic poets, the lineal descendant of Pope and Cowper, and the kindred spirit and rival of that most flamboyant of all the romantics, Crabbe."

"And Russian literature?" I asked. "Has that had any influence here?"

"Ever since the Russian Republic and the United States of Russia were called into being by the Emperor Alexander I. in 1819, Russian art and literature practically came to an end. Politics and business engrossed the minds of the rising generation there, and, as General John Bright, that dashing cavalry soldier, so well put it: 'The Russians are completely inartistic. They are a nation of shopkeepers.'"

"But are not we fighting the Russians in the Crimea now?" I asked.

"We are fighting in the Crimea, but not against the Russians. They are our Allies and we are fighting the Turks. The Emperor Constantine has arranged with our Foreign Secretary, Feargus O'Connor, that Russia is to have Constantinople, we are to take Egypt, and the French are to have Syria. As for Palestine, it is possible that the Jews may be allowed to go there. Ever since their expulsion from England twenty years ago, they have greatly complained of having nowhere to live."

Just at that moment an open carriage drove by drawn by four white horses with postilions and outriders. Inside the carriage a magnificent Englishman with a long black beard bowed to the populace, who cheered. I asked who it was.

"That is the King of Greece, once better known as

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Lord Elcho. He is here on a visit. The Greeks just now are very popular, as we are fighting the Turks."

We had passed the Houses of Parliament and had reached the doors of what I took to be a large theatre.

"Here," said my guide, "I must leave you. I must go to rehearsal."

"One moment," I said. "There is one name we have not mentioned connected with the world of literature: that of Charles Dickens. Are his works popular?"

My guide was convulsed with laughter.

"That," he said, "is a really good joke. Charles Dickens a writer!"

"But——" I said.

"My dear sir," he answered, "you surely are not going to argue the point with me. I am Charles Dickens, and your humble servant, an actor by profession, and if you would like to see me play Paul Pry to-night I can give you an order for a box and supper and some grilled bones afterwards."

I was about to answer something when I once again felt dizzy, and when I recovered consciousness again I was sitting in my rooms. I was alone this time, and the time by the clock was 1.16. I had been asleep for a minute.

A LUNCHEON-PARTY

I

MRS. BERGMANN was a widow. She was American by birth and marriage, and English by education and habits. She was a fair, beautiful woman, with large eyes and a white complexion. Her weak point was ambition, and ambition with her took the form of luncheon-parties.

It was one summer afternoon that she was seized with the great idea of her life. It consisted in giving a luncheon-party which should be more original and amusing than any other which had ever been given in London. The idea became a mania. It left her no peace. It possessed her like venom or like madness. She could think of nothing else. She racked her brains in imagining how it could be done. But the more she was harassed by this aim the farther off its realisation appeared to her to be. At last it began to weigh upon her. She lost her spirits and her appetite; her friends began to notice with anxiety the change in her behaviour and in her looks. She herself felt that the situation was intolerable, and that either success or suicide lay before her.

One evening towards the end of June, as she was sitting in her lovely drawing-room in her house in Mayfair, in front of her tea-table, on which the tea stood untasted, brooding over the question which tormented her unceasingly, she cried out, half aloud :

“ I’d sell my soul to the devil if he would give me what I wish.”

A LUNCHEON-PARTY

At that moment the footman entered the room and said there was a gentleman downstairs who wished to speak to her.

"What is his name?" asked Mrs. Bergmann.

The footman said he had not caught the gentleman's name, and he handed her a card on a tray.

She took the card. On it was written :

Mr. Nicholas L. Satan,

*1 Pandemonium Terrace,
Burning Marle, Hell.*

*Telephone,
No. 1 Central.*

"Show him up," said Mrs. Bergmann, quite naturally, as though she had been expecting the visitor. She wondered at her own behaviour, and she seemed to herself to be acting inevitably, as one does in dreams.

Mr. Satan was shown in. He had a professional air, but it suggested neither needy nor learned professionalism. He was dark; his features were sharp and regular, his eyes keen, his complexion sallow, his mouth firm, and his chin prominent. He was well dressed in a frock-coat, black tie, and patent leather boots. He would never have been taken for a conjurer or a shop-walker, but he might have been taken for a slightly depraved art-photographer who had known better days. He sat down near the tea-table opposite Mrs. Bergmann, holding his top-hat, which had a narrow mourning band round it, in his hand.

"I understand, madam," he spoke with an even American intonation, "you wish to be supplied with *a* guest who will make all other luncheon-parties look, so to speak, like thirty cents."

"Yes, that is just what I want," answered Mrs. Bergmann, who continued to be surprised at herself.

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"Well, I reckon there's no one living who'd suit," said Mr. Satan, "and I'd better supply you with a celebrity of *a* former generation." He then took out a small pocket-book from his coat pocket, and quickly turning over its leaves he asked in a monotonous tone, "Would you like a Philosopher? Anaxagoras, Aristotle, Aurelius, M.?"

"Oh no," answered Mrs. Bergmann, with decision; "they would ruin any luncheon."

"A Saint?" suggested Mr. Satan. "Antony, Ditto of Padua, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Mrs. Bergmann.

"A Theologian, good arguer?" asked Mr. Satan. "Aquinas, T.?"

"No," interrupted Mrs. Bergmann. "For Heaven's sake don't always give me the A's, or we shall never get on to anything. You'll be offering me Adam and Abel next."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Satan. "Latimer, Laud—Historic Interest, Church and Politics combined," he added quickly.

"I don't want a clergyman," said Mrs. Bergmann.

"Artist?" said Mr. Satan. "Andrea del Sarto, Angelo, M., Apelles?"

"You're going back to the A's," interrupted Mrs. Bergmann.

"Bellini, Benvenuto Cellini, Botticelli?" he continued imperturbably.

"What's the use of them when I can get Sargent every day?" asked Mrs. Bergmann.

"A man of action, perhaps? Alexander, Bonaparte, Cæsar, J., Cromwell, O., Hannibal?"

"Too heavy for luncheon," she answered; "they would do for *dinner*."

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“ Plain statesman ? Bismarck, Count ; Chatham, Lord ; Franklin, B. ; Richelieu, Cardinal.”

“ That would make the members of the Cabinet feel uncomfortable,” she said.

“ A Monarch ? Alfred ; beg pardon, he’s an A. Richard III., Peter the Great, Louis XI., Nero ? ”

“ No,” said Mrs. Bergmann. “ I can’t have a Royalty. It would make it too stiff.”

“ I have it,” said Mr. Satan—“ a highwayman : Dick Turpin ; or a housebreaker : Jack Sheppard or Charles Peace ? ”

“ Oh no,” said Mrs. Bergmann ; “ they might steal the Sèvres.”

“ A musician ? Bach or Beethoven ? ” he suggested.

“ He’s getting into the B’s now,” thought Mrs. Bergmann. “ No,” she added aloud ; “ we should have to ask him to play, and he can’t play modern music, I suppose, and musicians are so touchy.”

“ I think I have it,” said Mr. Satan—“ a wit : Dr. Johnson, Sheridan, Sidney Smith ? ”

“ We should probably find their jokes dull *now*,” said Mrs. Bergmann thoughtfully.

“ Miscellaneous ? ” inquired Mr. Satan, and, turning over several leaves of his notebook, he rattled out the following names : “ Alcibiades, kind of statesman ; Beau Brummel, fop ; Cagliostro, conjurer ; Robespierre, politician ; Charles Stuart, Pretender ; Warwick, King-maker ; Borgia, A., Pope ; Ditto, C., toxicologist ; Wallenstein, mercenary ; Bacon, Roger, man of science ; Ditto, F., dishonest official ; Tell, W., patriot ; Jones, Paul, pirate ; Lucullus, glutton ; Simon Stylites, eccentric ; Casanova, loose - liver ; Casabianca, cabin-boy ; Chicot, jester ; Sayers, T., prize - fighter ; Cook, Captain, tourist ; Nebuchadnezzar, food-faddist ;

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Juan, D., lover ; Froissart, war correspondent ; Julian, apostate ? ”

“ Don’t you see,” said Mrs. Bergmann, “ we must have some one everybody has heard of ? ”

“ David Garrick, actor and wit ? ” suggested Mr. Satan.

“ It’s no good having an actor nobody has seen act,” said Mrs. Bergmann.

“ What about a poet ? ” asked Mr. Satan. “ Homer, Virgil, Dante, Byron, Shakespeare ? ”

“ Shakespeare ! ” she cried out, “ the very thing. Everybody has heard of Shakespeare, more or less ; and I expect he’d get on with everybody, and wouldn’t feel offended if I asked some other poet to meet him. Can you get me Shakespeare ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Mr. Satan ; “ day and date ? ”

“ It must be Thursday fortnight,” said Mrs. Bergmann. “ And what, ah—er—your terms ? ”

“ The usual terms,” he answered. “ In return for supernatural service rendered you during your lifetime, your soul reverts to me at your death.”

Mrs. Bergmann’s brain began to work quickly. She was above all things a practical woman, and she immediately felt she was being defrauded.

“ I cannot consent to such terms,” she said. “ Surely you recognise the fundamental difference between this proposed contract and those which you concluded with others—with Dr. Faust, for instance ? They sold the control of their soul after death on condition of your putting yourself at their *entire* disposal during the whole of their lifetime, whereas you ask me to do the same thing in return for a few hours’ service. The proposal is preposterous.”

Mr. Satan rose from his chair. “ In that case, madam,” he said, “ I have the honour to wish you a good afternoon.”

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"Stop a moment," said Mrs. Bergmann ; "I don't see why we shouldn't arrive at a compromise. I am perfectly willing that you should have the control over my soul for a limited number of years—I believe there are precedents for such a course—let us say a million years."

"Ten million," said Mr. Satan quietly but firmly.

"In that case," answered Mrs. Bergmann, "we will take no notice of leap year, and we will count 365 days in every year."

"Certainly," said Mr. Satan, with an expression of somewhat ruffled dignity, "we always allow leap year, but, of course, thirteen years will count as twelve."

"Of course," said Mrs. Bergmann, with equal dignity.

"Then perhaps you will not mind signing the contract at once," said Mr. Satan, drawing from his pocket a typewritten page.

Mrs. Bergmann walked to the writing-table and took the paper from his hand.

"Over the stamp, please," said Mr. Satan.

"Must I—er—sign it in blood?" asked Mrs. Bergmann hesitatingly.

"You can if you like," said Mr. Satan, "but I prefer red ink ; it is quicker and more convenient."

He handed her a stylograph pen.

"Must it be witnessed?" she asked.

"No," he replied, "these kind of documents don't need a witness."

In a firm, bold handwriting Mrs. Bergmann signed her name in red ink across the sixpenny stamp. She half expected to hear a clap of thunder and to see Mr. Satan disappear, but nothing of the kind occurred. Mr. Satan took the document, folded it, placed it in his pocket-book, took up his hat and gloves, and said :

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"Mr. William Shakespeare will call to luncheon on Thursday week. At what hour is the luncheon to be?"

"One-thirty," said Mrs. Bergmann.

"He may be a few minutes late," answered Mr. Satan.

"Good afternoon, madam," and he bowed and withdrew.

Mrs. Bergmann chuckled to herself when she was alone.

"I have done him," she thought to herself, "because ten million years in eternity is nothing. He might just as well have said one second as ten million years, since anything less than eternity in eternity is nothing. It is curious how stupid the devil is in spite of all his experience. Now I must think about my invitations."

II

The morning of Mrs. Bergmann's luncheon had arrived. She had asked thirteen men and nine women.

But an hour before luncheon an incident happened which nearly drove Mrs. Bergmann distracted. One of her guests, who was also one of her most intimate friends, Mrs. Lockton, telephoned to her saying she had quite forgotten, but she had asked on that day a man to luncheon whom she did not know, and who had been sent to her by Walford, the famous professor. She ended the message by saying she would bring the stranger with her.

"What is his name?" asked Mrs. Bergmann, not without intense irritation, meaning to put a veto on the suggestion.

"His name is——" and at that moment the telephone communication was interrupted, and in spite of desperate efforts Mrs. Bergmann was unable to get on to Mrs. Lockton again. She reflected that it was quite useless for her to send a message saying that she had no room at her table, because Angela Lockton would probably

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bring the stranger all the same. Then she further reflected that in the excitement caused by the presence of Shakespeare it would not really much matter whether there was a stranger there or not. A little before half-past one the guests began to arrive. Lord Pantry of Assouan, the famous soldier, was the first comer. He was soon followed by Professor Morgan, an authority on Greek literature ; Mr. Peebles, the ex-Prime Minister ; Mrs. Hubert Baldwin, the immensely popular novelist ; the fascinating Mrs. Rupert Duncan, who was lending her genius to one of Ibsen's heroines at that moment ; Miss Medea Tring, one of the latest American beauties ; Corporal, the portrait-painter ; Richard Giles, critic and man of letters ; Hereward Blenheim, a young and rising politician, who before the age of thirty had already risen higher than most men of sixty ; Sir Horace Silvester, K.C.M.G., the brilliant financier, with his beautiful wife, Lady Irene ; Professor Leo Newcastle, the eminent man of science ; Lady Hyacinth Gloucester, and Mrs. Milden, who were well known for their beauty and charm ; Osmond Hall, the paradoxical playwright ; Monsieur Faubourg, the psychological novelist ; Count Sciarra, an Italian nobleman, about fifty years old, who had written a history of the Popes, and who was now staying in London ; Lady Herman, the beauty of a former generation, still extremely handsome ; and Willmott, the successful actor-manager. They were all assembled in the drawing-room upstairs, talking in knots and groups ; and there was a sense of pleasurable excitement and expectation in the air ; conversation was intermittent, and nearly everybody was talking about the weather. The Right Hon. John Lockton, the eminent lawyer, was the last guest to arrive.

"Angela will be here in a moment," he explained ;
"she asked me to come on first."

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Mrs. Bergmann grew restless. It was half-past one, and no Shakespeare. She tried to make her guests talk, with indifferent success. The expectation was too great. Everybody was absorbed by the thought of what was going to happen next. Ten minutes passed thus, and Mrs. Bergmann grew more and more anxious.

At last the bell rang, and soon Mrs. Lockton walked upstairs, leading with her an insignificant, ordinary-looking, middle-aged, rather portly man with shiny black hair, bald on the top of his head, and a blank, good-natured expression.

"I'm so sorry to be so late, Louise dear," she said. "Let me introduce Mr. — to you." And whether she had forgotten the name or not, Mrs. Bergmann did not know or care at the time, but Mrs. Lockton mumbled so that it was impossible to catch the name. Mrs. Bergmann shook hands with the stranger absent-mindedly, and, looking at the clock, saw that it was ten minutes to two.

"I have been deceived," she thought to herself, and anger rose in her breast like a wave. At the same time she felt the one thing necessary was not to lose her head, nor to let anything damp the spirits of her guests.

"We'll go down to luncheon directly," she said. "I'm expecting some one else, but he probably won't come till later." She led the way, and everybody trooped downstairs to the dining-room, feeling that disappointment was in store for them. Mrs. Bergmann left the place on her right vacant; she did not dare fill it up, because in her heart of hearts she felt certain Shakespeare would arrive, and she looked forward to a *coup de théâtre*, which would be quite spoilt if his place were occupied. On her left sat Count Sciarra; the unknown friend of Angela Lockton sat at the end of the table next to Willmott.

The luncheon started haltingly. Angela Lockton's

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friend was heard saying in a clear voice that the dust in London was very trying.

"Have you come from the country?" asked M. Faubourg. "I myself am just returned from Oxford, where I once more admired your admirable English lawns—*vos pelouses séculaires*."

"Yes," said the stranger; "I only came up to town to-day, because it seems indeed a waste and a pity to spend the finest time of the year in London."

Count Sciarra, who had not uttered a word since he had entered the house, turned to his hostess and asked her whom she considered, after herself, to be the most beautiful woman in the room—Lady Irene, Lady Hyacinth, or Mrs. Milden?

"Mrs. Milden," he went on, "has the smile of *La Gioconda*, and hands and hair for Leonardo to paint. Lady Gloucester," he continued, leaving out the Christian name, "is English, like one of Shakespeare's women, Desdemona or Imogen; and Lady Irene has no nationality, she belongs to the dream worlds of Shelley and D'Annunzio: she is the guardian lady of Shelley's *Sensitiva*, the vision of the lily.

'Quale un vaso liturgico d'argento.'

And you, madame, you take away all my sense of criticism. 'Vous me troublez trop pour que je définisse votre genre de beauté.'"

Mrs. Milden was soon engaged in a deep *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Peebles, who was heard every now and then to say, "Quite, quite." Miss Tring was holding forth to Silvester on French sculpture, and Silvester now and again said, "Oh, really!" in the tone of intense interest which his friends knew indicated that he was being acutely bored. Lady Hyacinth was discussing

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Socialism with Osmond Hall, Lady Herman was discussing the theory of evolution with Professor Newcastle, Mrs. Lockton, the question of the French Church, with Faubourg ; and Blenheim was discharging molten volcanic fragments of embryo exordiums and unfinished perorations to Willmott ; in fact, there was a general buzz of conversation.

"Have you been to see *Antony and Cleopatra* ?" asked Willmott of the stranger.

"Yes," said his neighbour, "I went last night ; many authors have treated the subject, and the version I saw last night was very pretty. I couldn't get a programme, so I didn't see who——"

"I think my version," interrupted Willmott, with pride, "is admitted to be the best."

"Ah ! it is your version !" said the stranger. "I beg your pardon, I think you treated the subject very well."

"Yes," said Willmott, "it is ungrateful material, but I think I made something fine of it."

"No doubt, no doubt," said the stranger.

"Do tell us," Mrs. Baldwin was heard to ask M. Faubourg across the table, "what the young generation are doing in France ? Who are the young novelists ?"

"There are no young novelists worth mentioning," answered M. Faubourg.

Miss Tring broke in, and said she considered *Le Visage Emerveillé*, by the Comtesse de Noailles, to be the most beautiful book of the century, with the exception, perhaps, of the *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*.

But from the end of the table Blenheim's utterance was heard preponderating over that of his neighbours. He was making a fine speech on the modern stage, comparing an actor-manager to Napoleon, and commenting on the campaigns of the latter in detail.

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Quite heedless of this, Mr. Willmott was carrying on an equally impassioned but much slower monologue on his conception of the character of Cyrano de Bergerac, which he said he intended to produce. "Cyrano," he said, "has been maligned by Coquelin. Coquelin is a great artist, but he did not understand Cyrano. Cyrano is a dreamer, a poet; he is a martyr of thought like Tolstoi, a sacrifice to wasted, useless action, like Hamlet; he is a Molière come too soon, a Bayard come too late, a John the Baptist of the stage, calling out in vain in the wilderness—of bricks and mortar; he is misunderstood;—an enigma, an anachronism, a premature herald, a false dawn."

Count Sciarra was engaged in a third monologue at the head of the table. He was talking at the same time to Mrs. Bergmann, Lady Irene, and Lady Hyacinth about the devil. "Ah que j'aime le diable!" he was saying in low, tender tones. "The devil who creates your beauty to lure us to destruction, the devil who puts honey into the voice of the siren, the *dolce sirena* :

'Che i marinari in mezzo il mar dismaga' "

(and he hummed this line in a sing-song two or three times over)—"the devil who makes us dream and doubt, and who made life interesting by persuading Eve to eat the silver apple—what would life have been if she had not eaten the apple? We should all be in the silly trees of the Garden of Eden, and I should be sitting next to you" (he said to Mrs. Bergmann), "without knowing that you were beautiful; *que vous êtes belle et que vous êtes désirable; que vous êtes puissante et câline, que je fais naufrage dans une mer d'amour—e il naufragio m'è dolce in questo mare—en un mot, que je vous aime.*"

"Life outside the Garden of Eden has many draw-

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backs," said Mrs. Bergmann, who, although she was inwardly pleased by Count Sciarra's remarks, saw by Lady Irene's expression that she thought he was mad.

"Aucun 'drawback,' " answered Sciarra, "*n'égalerait celui de contempler les divins contours féminins sans un frisson. Pensez donc si Madame Bergmann——*"

"Count Sciarra," interrupted Mrs. Bergmann, terrified of what was coming next, "do tell me about the book you are writing on Venice."

Mrs. Lockton was at that moment discussing portraiture in novels with M. Faubourg, and during a pause Miss Tring was heard to make the following remark: "And is it true, M. Faubourg, that Cécile in *La Mauvaise Bonté* is a portrait of some one you once loved and who treated you very badly?"

M. Faubourg, a little embarrassed, said that a creative artist made a character out of many originals.

Then, seeing that nobody was saying a word to his neighbour, he turned round and asked him if he had been to the Academy.

"Yes," answered the stranger; "it gets worse every year, doesn't it?"

"But Mr. Corporal's pictures are always worth seeing," said Faubourg.

"I think he paints men better than women," said the stranger; "he doesn't flatter people, but of course his pictures are very clever."

At this moment the attention of the whole table was monopolised by Osmond Hall, who began to discuss the scenario of a new play he was writing. "My play," he began, "is going to be called *The King of the North Pole*. I have never been to the North Pole, and I don't mean to go there. It's not necessary to have first-hand knowledge of technical subjects in order to write a play. People

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say that Shakespeare must have studied the law, because his allusions to the law are frequent and accurate. That does not prove that he knew law any more than the fact that he put a sea in Bohemia proves that he did not know geography. It proves he was a dramatist. He wanted a sea in Bohemia. He wanted lawyer's 'shop.' I should do just the same thing myself. I wrote a play about doctors, knowing nothing about medicine : I asked a friend to give me the necessary information. Shakespeare, I expect, asked his friends to give him the legal information he required."

Every allusion to Shakespeare was a stab to Mrs. Bergmann.

"Shakespeare's knowledge of the law is very thorough," broke in Lockton.

"Not so thorough as the knowledge of medicine which is revealed in my play," said Hall.

"Shakespeare knew law by intuition," murmured Willmott, "but he did not guess what the modern stage would make of his plays."

"Let us hope not," said Giles.

"Shakespeare," said Faubourg, "was a *psychologue* ; he had the power—I cannot say it in English—*de deviner ce qu'il ne savait pas, en puisant dans le fond et le tréfond de son âme*."

"Gammon !" said Hall ; "he had the power of asking his friends for the information he required."

"Do you really think," asked Giles, "that before he wrote 'Time delves the parallel on beauty's brow,' he consulted his lawyer as to a legal metaphor suitable for a sonnet ?"

"And do you think," asked Mrs. Duncan, "that he asked his female relations what it would feel like to be jealous of Octavia if one happened to be Cleopatra ?"

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"Shakespeare was a married man," said Hall, "and if his wife found the MS. of his sonnets lying about he must have known a jealous woman."

"Shakespeare evidently didn't trouble his friends for information on natural history," said Professor New-castle; "his remarks on the cuckoo and the bee are ridiculous."

"Ridiculous for a writer on natural history, not for a playwright," said Hall. "I myself should not mind what liberty I took with the cuckoo, the bee, or even the basilisk. I should not trouble you for accurate information on the subject; I should not even mind saying the cuckoo laid eggs in its own nest if it suited the dramatic situation."

The whole of this conversation was torture to Mrs. Bergmann.

"Shakespeare," said Lady Hyacinth, "had a universal nature; one can't help thinking he was almost like God."

"That's what people will say of me a hundred years hence," said Hall; "only it is to be hoped they'll leave out the 'almost.'"

"Shakespeare understood love," said Lady Herman, in a loud voice; "he knew how a man makes love to a woman. If Richard III. had made love to me as Shakespeare describes him doing it, I'm not sure that I could have resisted him. But the finest of all Shakespeare's men is Othello. That's a real man. Desdemona was a fool. It's not wonderful that Othello didn't see through Iago; but Desdemona ought to have seen through him. The stupidest woman can see through a clever man; but, of course, Othello was a fool too."

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Lockton; "if Napoleon had married Desdemona he would have made Iago marry one of his sisters."

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"I think Desdemona is the most pathetic of Shakespeare's heroines," said Lady Hyacinth; "don't you think so, Mr. Hall?"

"It's easy enough to make a figure pathetic who is strangled by a nigger," answered Hall. "Now if Desdemona had been a negress Shakespeare would have started fair."

"If only Shakespeare had lived later," sighed Willmott, "and understood the conditions of the modern stage, he would have written quite differently."

"If Shakespeare had lived now he would have written novels," said Faubourg.

"Yes," said Mrs. Baldwin, "I feel sure you are right there."

"If Shakespeare had lived now," said Sciarra to Mrs. Bergmann, "we shouldn't notice his existence; he would be just *un monsieur comme tout le monde*—like that monsieur sitting next to Faubourg," he added in a low voice.

"The problem about Shakespeare," broke in Hall, "is not how he wrote his plays. I could teach a poodle to do that in half an hour. But the problem is—What made him leave off writing just when he was beginning to know how to do it? It is as if I had left off writing plays ten years ago."

"Perhaps," said the stranger hesitatingly and modestly, "he had made enough money by writing plays to retire on his earnings and live in the country."

Nobody took any notice of this remark.

"If Bacon was really the playwright," said Lockton, "the problem is a very different one."

"If Bacon had written Shakespeare's plays," said Silvester, "they wouldn't have been so bad."

"There seems to me to be only one argument," said

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Professor Morgan, "in favour of the Bacon theory, and that is that the range of mind displayed in Shakespeare's plays is so great that it would have been child's play for the man who wrote Shakespeare's plays to have written the works of Bacon."

"Yes," said Hall, "but because it would be child's play for the man who wrote my plays to have written your works and those of Professor Newcastle—which it would—it doesn't prove that you wrote my plays."

"Bacon was a philosopher," said Willmott, "and Shakespeare was a poet—a dramatic poet; but Shakespeare was also an actor, an actor-manager, and only an actor-manager could have written the plays."

"What do you think of the Bacon theory?" asked Faubourg of the stranger.

"I think," said the stranger, "that we shall soon have to say eggs and Shakespeare instead of eggs and Bacon."

This remark caused a slight shudder to pass through all the guests, and Mrs. Bergmann felt sorry that she had not taken decisive measures to prevent the stranger's intrusion.

"Shakespeare wrote his own plays," said Sciarra, "and I don't know if he knew law, but he knew *le cœur de la femme*. Cleopatra bids her slave find out the colour of Octavia's hair; that is just what my wife, my Angelica, would do if I were to marry some one in London while she was at Rome."

"Mr. Gladstone used to say," broke in Lockton, "that Dante was inferior to Shakespeare, because he was too great an optimist."

"Dante was not an optimist," said Sciarra, "about the future life of politicians. But I think they were both of them pessimists about man and optimists about God."

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"Shakespeare——" began Blenheim ; but he was interrupted by Mrs. Duncan, who cried out :

"I wish he were alive now and would write me a part, a real woman's part. The women have so little to do in Shakespeare's plays. There's Juliet ; but one can't play Juliet till one's forty, and then one's too old to look fourteen. There's Lady Macbeth ; but she's got nothing to do except walk in her sleep and say, ' Out, damned spot ! ' There were no actresses in his days, and of course it was no use writing a woman's part for a boy."

"You should have been born in France," said Faubourg. "Racine's women are created for you to play."

"Ah ! you've got Sarah," said Mrs. Duncan ; "you don't want any one else."

"I think Racine's boring," said Mrs. Lockton, "he's so artificial."

"Oh, don't say that !" said Giles. "Racine is the most exquisite of poets, so sensitive, so acute, and so harmonious."

"I like Rostand better," said Mrs. Lockton.

"Rostand !" exclaimed Miss Tring, in disgust ; "he writes such bad verse—*du caoutchouc*—he's so vulgar."

"It is true," said Willmott, "he's an amateur. He has never written professionally for his bread, but only for his pleasure."

"But in that sense," said Giles, "God is an amateur."

"I confess," said Peebles, "that I cannot appreciate French poetry. I can read Rousseau with pleasure, and Bossuet ; but I cannot admire Corneille and Racine."

"Everybody writes plays now," said Faubourg, with a sigh.

"I have never written a play," said Lord Pantry.

"Nor I," said Lockton.

"But nearly every one at this table has," said Faubourg.

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"Mrs. Baldwin has written *Matilda*, Mr. Giles has written a tragedy called *Queen Swafrod*, I wrote a play in my youth, my *Le Ménétrier de Parme* ; I'm sure Corporal has written a play. Count Sciarra must have written several. Have you ever written a play ? " he said, turning to his neighbour, the stranger.

"Yes," answered the stranger. "I once wrote a play called *Hamlet*."

"You were courageous with such an original before you," said Faubourg severely.

"Yes," said the stranger, "the original was very good, but I think," he added modestly, "that I improved upon it."

"*Encore un faiseur de paradoxes !*" murmured Faubourg to himself in disgust.

In the meantime Willmott was giving Professor Morgan the benefit of his views on Greek art, punctuated with allusions to Tariff Reform and devolution for the benefit of Blenheim.

Luncheon was over and cigarettes were lighted. Mrs. Bergmann had quite made up her mind that she had been cheated, and there was only one thing for which she consoled herself, and that was that she had not waited for luncheon but had gone down immediately, since so far all her guests had kept up a continuous stream of conversation, which had every now and then become general, though they still every now and then glanced at the empty chair and wondered what the coming attraction was going to be. Mrs. Milden had carried on two almost uninterrupted *tête-à-têtes*, first with one of her neighbours, then with the other. In fact, everybody had talked, except the stranger, who had hardly spoken, and since Faubourg had turned away from him in disgust, nobody had taken any further notice of him.

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Mrs. Baldwin, remarking this, good-naturedly leant across the table and asked him if he had come to London for the Wagner cycle.

"No," he answered. "I came for the Horse Show at Olympia."

At this moment Count Sciarra, having finished his third cigarette, turned to his hostess and thanked her for having allowed him to meet the most beautiful women of London in the most beautiful house in London, and in the house of the most beautiful hostess in London.

"*J'ai vu chez vous,*" he said, "*le lys argenté et la rose blanche, mais vous êtes la rose écarlate, la rose d'amour, dont le parfum vivra dans mon cœur comme un poison doré* (and here he hummed in a sing-song): '*Io son, cantava, Io son, dolce sirena*' ; *Addio, dolce sirena.*"

Then he suddenly and abruptly got up, kissed his hostess's hand vehemently three times, and said he was sorry, but he must hasten to keep a pressing engagement. He left the room.

Mrs. Bergmann got up and said, "Let us go upstairs." But the men had most of them to go, some to the House of Commons, others to keep various engagements.

The stranger thanked Mrs. Bergmann for her kind hospitality and left. And the remaining guests, seeing that no further attraction was to be expected, took their leave reluctantly and went, feeling that they had been cheated.

Angela Lockton stayed a moment.

"Who were you expecting, Louise dear?" she asked.

"Only an old friend," said Mrs. Bergmann, "whom you would all have been very glad to see. Only as he doesn't want anybody to know he's in London, I couldn't tell you all who he was."

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“ But tell me now,” said Mrs. Lockton ; “ you know how discreet I am.”

“ I promised not to, dearest Angela,” she answered ; “ and, by the way, what was the name of the man you brought with you ? ”

“ Didn't I tell you ? How stupid of me ! ” said Mrs. Lockton. “ It's a very easy name to remember : Shakespeare, William Shakespeare.”

THE ISLAND

“**P**ERHAPS we had better not land after all,” said Lewis, as he was stepping into the boat ; “ we can explore this island on our way home.”

“ We had much better land now,” said Stewart ; “ we shall get to Teneriffe to-morrow in any case. Besides, an island that’s not on the chart is too exciting a thing to wait for.”

Lewis gave in to his younger companion, and the two ornithologists, who were on their way to the Canary Islands in search of eggs, were rowed to shore.

“ They had better fetch us at sunset,” said Lewis as they landed.

“ Perhaps we shall stay the night,” answered Stewart.

“ I don’t think so,” said Lewis ; but after a pause he told the sailors that if they should be more than half an hour late, they were not to wait, but to come back in the morning at ten. Lewis and Stewart walked from the sandy bay up a steep basaltic cliff which sloped right down to the beach.

“ The island is volcanic,” said Stewart.

“ All the islands about here are volcanic,” said Lewis. “ We shan’t be able to climb much in this heat,” he added.

“ It will be all right when we get to the trees,” said Stewart. Presently they reached the top of the cliff. The basaltic rock ceased and an open grassy incline was before them, covered with myrtle and cactus bushes ; and farther off a thick wood, to the east of which rose a

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hill sparsely dotted with olive trees. They sat down on the grass, panting. The sun beat down on the dry rock ; there was not a cloud in the sky nor a ripple on the emerald sea. In the air there was a strange aromatic scent ; and the stillness was heavy.

" I don't think it can be inhabited," said Lewis.

" Perhaps it's merely a volcanic island cast up by a sea disturbance," suggested Stewart.

" Look at those trees," said Lewis, pointing to the wood in the distance.

" What about them ? " asked Stewart.

" They are oak trees," said Lewis. " Do you know why I didn't want to land ? " he asked abruptly. " I am not superstitious, you know, but as I got into the boat I distinctly heard a voice calling out, ' Don't land ! ' "

Stewart laughed. " I think it was a good thing to land," he said. " Let's go on now."

They walked towards the wood, and the nearer they got to it the more their surprise increased. It was a thick wood of large oak trees which must certainly have been a hundred years old. When they had got quite close to it they paused.

" Before we explore the wood," said Lewis, " let us climb the hill and see if we can get a general view of the island."

Stewart agreed, and they climbed the hill in silence. When they reached the top they found it was not the highest point of the island, but only one of several hills, so that the view was limited. The valleys seemed to be densely wooded, and the oak wood was larger than they had imagined. They lay down and rested and lit their pipes.

" No birds," remarked Lewis gloomily.

" I haven't seen one—the island is extraordinarily

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still," said Stewart. The farther they had penetrated inland the more oppressive and sultry the air had become ; and the pungent aroma they had noticed directly was stronger. It was like that of mint, and yet it was not mint ; and although sweet it was not agreeable. The heat seemed to weigh even on Stewart's buoyant spirits, for he sat smoking in silence, and no longer urged Lewis to continue their exploration.

" I think the island is inhabited," said Lewis, " and that the houses are on the other side. There are some sheep and some goats on that hill opposite. Do you see ? "

" Yes," said Stewart. " I think they are moufflon, but I don't think the island is inhabited all the same." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he started, and rising to his feet, cried, " Look there ! " and he pointed to a thin wreath of smoke which was rising from the wood. Their languor seemed to leave them, and they ran down the hill and reached the wood once more. Just as they were about to enter it Lewis stooped and pointed to a small plant with white flowers and three oval-shaped leaves rising from the root.

" What's that ? " he asked Stewart, who was the better botanist of the two. The flowers were quite white, and each had six pointed petals.

" It's a kind of garlic, I think," said Stewart.

Lewis bent down over it. " It doesn't smell," he said. " It's not unlike moly, *Allium flavum* ; only it's white instead of yellow, and the flowers are larger. I'm going to take it with me." He began scooping away the earth with a knife so as to take out the plant by the roots. After he had been working for some minutes he exclaimed, " This is the toughest plant I've ever seen ; I can't get it out." He was at last successful, but as he pulled the

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root he gave a cry of surprise. "There's no bulb," he said. "Look ! only a black root."

Stewart examined the plant. "I can't make it out," he said.

Lewis wrapped the plant in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket. They entered the wood. The air was still more sultry here than outside, and the stillness even more oppressive. There were no birds and not a vestige of bird life.

"This exploration is evidently a waste of time as far as birds are concerned," remarked Lewis. At that moment there was a rustle in the undergrowth, and five pigs crossed their path and disappeared, grunting. Lewis started, and, for some reason he could not account for, shuddered ; he looked at Stewart, who appeared unconcerned.

"They are not wild," said Stewart. They walked on in silence. The place and its heavy atmosphere had again affected their spirits. When they spoke it was almost in a whisper. Lewis wished they had not landed, but he could give no reason to himself for his wish. After they had been walking for about twenty minutes they suddenly came on an open space and a low white house. They stopped and looked at each other.

"Where is the chimney ?" cried Lewis, who was the first to speak. It was a one-storeyed building, with large windows (which had no glass in them) reaching to the ground, wider at the bottom than at the top. The house was overgrown with creepers ; the roof was flat. They entered in silence by the large open doorway and found themselves in a low hall. There was no furniture and the floor was mossy.

"It's rather like an Egyptian tomb," said Stewart, and he shivered. The hall led into a farther room, which was

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open in the centre to the sky, like the *impluvium* of a Roman house. It also contained a square basin of water, which was filled by water bubbling from a lion's mouth carved in stone. Beyond the *impluvium* there were two smaller rooms, in one of which there was a kind of raised stone platform. The house was completely deserted and empty. Lewis and Stewart said little ; they examined the house in silent amazement.

"Look," said Lewis, pointing to one of the walls. Stewart examined the wall and noticed that there were traces on it of a faded painted decoration.

"It's like the wall paintings at Pompeii," he said.

"I think the house is modern," remarked Lewis. "It was probably built by some eccentric at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who did it up in Empire style."

"Do you know what time it is ?" said Stewart suddenly. "The sun has set and it's growing dark."

"We must go at once," said Lewis ; "we'll come back here to-morrow." They walked on in silence. The wood was dim in the twilight, a fitful breeze made the trees rustle now and again, but the air was just as sultry as ever. The shapes of the trees seemed fantastic and almost threatening in the dimness, and the rustle of the leaves was like a human moan. Once or twice they seemed to hear the grunting of pigs in the undergrowth, and to catch sight of bristly backs.

"We don't seem to be getting any nearer the end," said Stewart after a time. "I think we've taken the wrong path." They stopped. "I remember that tree," said Stewart, pointing to a twisted oak ; "we must go straight on from there to the left." They walked on, and in ten minutes' time found themselves once more at the back of the house. It was now quite dark.

"We shall never find the way now," said Lewis.

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"We had better sleep in the house." They walked through the house into one of the farthest rooms and settled themselves on the mossy platform. The night was warm and starry, the house deathly still except for the splashing of the water in the basin.

"We shan't get any food," Lewis said.

"I'm not hungry," said Stewart, and Lewis knew that he could not have eaten anything to save his life. He felt utterly exhausted and yet not at all sleepy. Stewart, on the other hand, was overcome with drowsiness. He lay down on the mossy platform and fell asleep almost instantly. Lewis lit a pipe; the vague forebodings he had felt in the morning had returned to him, only increased tenfold. He felt an unaccountable physical discomfort, an inexplicable sensation of uneasiness. Then he realised what it was. He felt there was some one in the house besides themselves, some one or something that was always behind him, moving when he moved, and watching him. He walked into the *impluvium*, but heard nothing and saw nothing. There were none of the thousand little sounds, such as the barking of a dog, or the hoot of a night-bird, which generally complete the silence of a summer night. Everything was uncannily still. He returned to the room. He would have given anything to be back on the yacht, for besides the physical sensation of discomfort and of the something watching him he also felt the unmistakable sense of impending danger that had been with him nearly all day.

He lay down and at last fell into a doze. As he dozed he heard a subdued noise, a kind of buzzing, such as is made by a spinning-wheel or a shuttle on a loom, and more strongly than ever he felt that he was being watched. Then all at once his body seemed to grow stiff with fright. He saw some one enter the room from the *impluvium*.

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It was a dim, veiled figure, the figure of a woman. He could not distinguish her features, but he had the impression that she was strangely beautiful ; she was bearing a cup in her hands, and she walked towards Stewart and bent over him, offering him the cup.

Something in Lewis prompted him to cry out with all his might, " Don't drink ! Don't drink ! " He heard the words echoing in the air, just as he had heard the voice in the boat ; he felt that it was imperative to call out, and yet he could not : he was paralysed ; the words would not come. He formed them with his lips, but no sound came. He tried with all his might to rise and scream, and he could not move. Then a sudden cold faintness came upon him, and he remembered no more till he woke and found the sun shining brightly. Stewart was lying with eyes closed, moaning loudly in his sleep.

Lewis tried to wake him. He opened his eyes and stared with a fixed, meaningless stare. Lewis tried to lift him from the platform, and then a horrible thing happened. Stewart struggled violently and made a snarling noise, which froze the blood in Lewis's veins. He ran out of the house with cold beads of sweat on his forehead. He ran through the wood to the shore, and there he found the boat. He rowed back to the yacht and fetched some quinine. Then, together with the skipper, the steward, and some other sailors, he returned to the ominous house. They found it empty. There was no trace of Stewart. They shouted in the wood till they were hoarse, but no answer broke the heavy stillness.

Then sending for the rest of the crew, Lewis organised a regular search over the whole island. This lasted till sunset, and they returned in the evening without having found any trace of Stewart or of any other human being. In the night a high wind rose, which soon became a gale ;

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they were obliged to weigh anchor so as not to be dashed against the island, and for twenty-four hours they underwent a terrific tossing. Then the storm subsided as quickly as it had come.

They made for the island once more and reached the spot where they had anchored three days before. There was no trace of the island. It had disappeared.

When they reached Teneriffe the next day they found that everybody was talking of the great tidal wave which had caused such damage and destruction in the islands.

THE SHADOW OF A MIDNIGHT

IT was nine o'clock in the evening. Sasha, the maid, had brought in the *Samovar* and placed it at the head of the long table. Marie Nikolaevna, our hostess, poured out the tea. Her husband was playing *vindt* with his daughter, the doctor, and his son-in-law in another corner of the room. And Jameson, who had just finished his Russian lesson—he was working for the Civil Service examination—was reading the last number of the *Ruskoe Slovo*.

"Have you found anything interesting, Frantz Frantsovitch?" said Marie Nikolaevna to Jameson, as she handed him a glass of tea.

"Yes, I have," answered the Englishman, looking up. His eyes had a clear dreaminess about them, which generally belongs only to fanatics or visionaries, and I had no reason to believe that Jameson, who seemed to be common sense personified, was either one or the other. "At least," he continued, "it interests me. And it's odd—very odd."

"What is it?" asked Marie Nikolaevna.

"Well, to tell you what it is would mean a long story which you wouldn't believe," said Jameson; "only it's odd—very odd."

"Tell us the story," I said.

"As you won't believe a word of it," Jameson repeated, "it's not much use my telling it."

We insisted on hearing the story, so Jameson lit a cigarette, and began:

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“Two years ago,” he said, “I was at Heidelberg, at the University, and I made friends with a young fellow called Braun. His parents were German, but he had lived five or six years in America, and he was practically an American. I made his acquaintance by chance at a lecture, when I first arrived, and he helped me in a number of ways. He was an energetic and kind-hearted fellow, and we became great friends. He was a student, but he did not belong to any *Korps* or *Burschenschaft*, as he was working hard. Afterwards he became an engineer. When the summer *Semester* came to an end, we both stayed on at Heidelberg. One day Braun suggested that we should go for a walking tour and explore the country. I was only too pleased, and we started. It was glorious weather, and we enjoyed ourselves hugely. On the third night after we had started we arrived at a village called Salzheim. It was a picturesque little place, and there was a curious old church in it with some interesting tombs and relics of the Thirty Years’ War. But the inn where we put up for the night was even more picturesque than the church. It had once been a convent for nuns, only the greater part of it had been burnt, and only a quaint gabled house, and a tower covered with ivy, which I suppose had once been the belfry, remained. We had an excellent supper and went to bed early. We had been given two bedrooms, which were airy and clean, and altogether we were satisfied. My bedroom opened into Braun’s, which was beyond it, and had no other door of its own. It was a hot night in July, and Braun asked me to leave the door open. I did—we opened both the windows. Braun went to bed and fell asleep almost directly, for very soon I heard his snores.

“I had imagined that I was longing for sleep, but

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no sooner had I got into bed than all my sleepiness left me. This was odd, because we had walked a good many miles, and it had been a blazing hot day, and up till then I had slept like a log the moment I got into bed. I lit a candle and began reading a small volume of Heine I carried with me. I heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven, and still I felt that sleep was out of the question. I said to myself, 'I will read till twelve and then I will stop.' My watch was on a chair by my bedside, and when the clock struck eleven I noticed that it was five minutes slow, and set it right. I could see the church tower from my window, and every time the clock struck—and it struck the quarters—the noise boomed through the room.

"When the clock struck a quarter to twelve I yawned for the first time, and I felt thankful that sleep seemed at last to be coming to me. I left off reading, and taking my watch in my hand I waited for midnight to strike. That quarter of an hour seemed an eternity. At last the hands of my watch showed that it was one minute to twelve. I put out my candle and began counting sixty, waiting for the clock to strike. I had counted a hundred and sixty, and still the clock had not struck. I counted up to four hundred ; then I thought I must have made a mistake. I lit my candle again, and looked at my watch : it was two minutes past twelve. And still the clock had not struck !

"A curious uncomfortable feeling came over me, and I sat up in bed with my watch in my hand and longed to call Braun, who was peacefully snoring, but I did not like to. I sat like this till a quarter past twelve ; the clock struck the quarter as usual. I made up my mind that the clock must have struck twelve, and that I must have slept for a minute—at the same time I knew I had not

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slept—and I put out my candle. I must have fallen asleep almost directly.

“The next thing I remember was waking with a start. It seemed to me that some one had shut the door between my room and Braun's. I felt for the matches. The match-box was empty. Up to that moment—I cannot tell why—something—an unaccountable dread—had prevented me looking at the door. I made an effort and looked. It was shut, and through the cracks and through the keyhole I saw the glimmer of a light. Braun had lit his candle. I called him, not very loudly : there was no answer. I called again more loudly : there was still no answer.

“Then I got out of bed and walked to the door. As I went, it was gently and slightly opened, just enough to show me a thin streak of light. At that moment I felt that some one was looking at me. Then it was instantly shut once more, as softly as it had been opened. There was not a sound to be heard. I walked on tiptoe towards the door, but it seemed to me that I had taken a hundred years to cross the room. And when at last I reached the door I felt I could not open it. I was simply paralysed with fear. And still I saw the glimmer through the keyhole and the cracks.

“Suddenly, as I was standing transfixed with fright in front of the door, I heard sounds coming from Braun's room, a shuffle of footsteps, and voices talking low but distinctly in a language I could not understand. It was not Italian, Spanish, nor French. The voices grew all at once louder ; I heard the noise of a struggle and a cry which ended in a stifled groan, very painful and horrible to hear. Then, whether I regained my self-control, or whether it was excess of fright which prompted me, I don't know, but I flew to the door and tried to open it.

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Some one or something was pressing with all its might against it. Then I screamed at the top of my voice, and as I screamed I heard the cock crow.

"The door gave, and I almost fell into Braun's room. It was quite dark. But Braun was waked by my screams and quietly lit a match. He asked me gently what on earth was the matter. The room was empty and everything was in its place. Outside the first greyness of dawn was in the sky.

"I said I had had a nightmare, and asked him if he had not had one as well ; but Braun said he had never slept better in his life.

"The next day we went on with our walking tour, and when we got back to Heidelberg Braun sailed for America. I never saw him again, although we corresponded frequently, and only last week I had a letter from him, dated Nizhni-Novgorod, saying he would be at Moscow before the end of the month.

"And now I suppose you are all wondering what this can have to do with anything that's in the newspaper. Well, listen," and he read out the following paragraph from the *Ruskoe Slovo* :

"Samara, 11, ix. In the centre of the town, in the Hotel —, a band of armed swindlers attacked a German engineer named Braun and demanded money. On his refusal one of the robbers stabbed Braun with a knife. The robbers, taking the money which was on him, amounting to 500 roubles, got away. Braun called for assistance, but died of his wounds in the night. It appears that he had met the swindlers at a restaurant."

"Since I have been in Russia," Jameson added, "I have often thought that I knew what language it was that was talked behind the door that night in the inn at Salzheim, but now I know it was Russian."

FÊTE GALANTE

“**T**HE King said that nobody had ever danced as I danced to-night,” said Columbine. “He said it was more than dancing, it was magic.”

“It is true,” said Harlequin ; “you never danced like that before.”

But Pierrot paid no heed to their remarks, and stared vacantly at the sky. They were sitting on the deserted stage of the grass amphitheatre where they had been playing. Behind them were the clumps of cypress trees which framed a vista of endless wooded garden and formed their drop-scene. They were sitting immediately beneath the wooden framework made of two upright beams and one horizontal, which formed the primitive proscenium, and from which little coloured lights had hung during the performance. The King and Queen and their lords and ladies who had looked on at the living puppet show had all left the amphitheatre ; they had put on their masks and their dominoes, and were now dancing on the lawns, whispering in the alleys and the avenues, or sitting in groups under the tall dark trees. Some of them were in boats on the lake, and everywhere, from the dark boscsages, came sounds of music, thin, tinkling tunes played on guitars by skilled hands, and the bird-like twittering and whistling of flageolets.

“The King said I looked like a moon fairy,” said Columbine to Pierrot. Pierrot only stared at the sky and laughed inanely. “If you persist in slighting me like this,” she whispered in his ear, in a whisper which was

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like a hiss, "I will abandon you for ever. I will give my heart to Harlequin, and you shall never see me again." But Pierrot continued to stare at the sky, and laughed once more inanely. Then Columbine got up, her eyes flashing with rage; taking Harlequin by the arm she dragged him swiftly away. They danced across the grass semicircle of the amphitheatre and up the steps away into the alleys. Pierrot was left alone with Pantaloon, who was asleep, for he was old, and clowning fatigued him. Then Pierrot left the amphitheatre also, and putting a black mask on his face he joined the revellers who were everywhere dancing, whispering, talking, and making music in subdued tones. He sought out a long, lonely avenue, in one side of which there nestled, almost entirely concealed by bushes and undergrowth, a round, open Greek temple. Right at the end of the avenue a foaming waterfall plashed down into a large marble basin, from which a tall fountain rose, white and ghostly, and made a sobbing noise. Pierrot went towards the temple, then he turned back and walked right into the undergrowth through the bushes, and lay down on the grass, and listened to the singing of the night-jar. The whole garden that night seemed to be sighing and whispering; there was a soft, warm wind, and a smell of mown hay in the air, and an intoxicating sweetness came from the bushes of syringa. Columbine and Harlequin also joined the revellers. They passed from group to group, with aimless curiosity, pausing sometimes by the artificial ponds and sometimes by the dainty groups of dancers, whose satin and whose pearls glimmered faintly in the shifting moonlight, for the night was cloudy. At last they too were tired of the revel; they wandered towards a more secluded place, and made for the avenue which Pierrot had sought. On their way they passed

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through a narrow grass walk between two rows of closely cropped yew hedges. There on a marble seat a tall man in a black domino was sitting, his head resting on his hands ; and between the loose folds of his satin cloak one caught the glint of precious stones. When they had passed him Columbine whispered to Harlequin, " That is the King. I caught sight of his jewelled collar." They presently found themselves in the long avenue at the end of which were the waterfall and the fountain. They wandered on till they reached the Greek temple, and there suddenly Columbine put her finger on her lips. Then she led Harlequin back a little way and took him round through the undergrowth to the back of the temple, and, crouching down in the bushes, bade him look. In the middle of the temple there was a statue of Eros holding a torch in his hands. Standing close beside the statue were two figures—a man dressed as a Pierrot, and a beautiful lady who wore a grey satin domino. She had taken off her mask and pushed back the hood from her hair, which was encircled by a diadem made of something shining and silvery, and a ray of moonlight fell on her face, which was as delicate as the petal of a flower. Pierrot was masked ; he was holding her hand and looking into her eyes, which were turned upwards towards his.

" It is the Queen ! " whispered Columbine to Harlequin. And once more putting her finger on her lips, she deftly led him by the hand and noiselessly threaded her way through the bushes and back into the avenue, and without saying a word ran swiftly with him to the place where they had seen the King. He was still there, alone, his head resting upon his hands.

In the temple the Queen was upbraiding her lover for

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his temerity in having crossed the frontier into the land from which he had been banished for ever, and for having dared to appear at Court disguised as Pierrot. "Remember," she was saying, "the enemies that surround us, the dreadful peril, and the doom that awaits us." And her lover said, "What is doom, and what is death? You whispered to the night, and I heard. You sighed, and I am here!" He tore the mask from his face, and the Queen looked at him and smiled. At that moment a rustle was heard in the undergrowth, and the Queen started back from him, whispering, "We are betrayed! Fly!" And her lover put on his mask and darted through the undergrowth, following a path which he and no one else knew, till he came to an open space where his squire awaited him with horses, and they galloped away safe from all pursuit.

Then the King walked into the temple and led the Queen back to the palace without saying a word; but the whole avenue was full of dark men bearing torches and armed with swords, who were searching the undergrowth. And presently they found Pierrot who, ignorant of all that had happened, had been listening all night to the song of the night-jar. He was dragged to the palace and cast into a dungeon, and the King was told. But the revel did not cease, and the dancing and the music continued softly as before. The King sent for Columbine and told her she should have speech with Pierrot in his prison, for haply he might have something to confess to her. And Columbine was taken to Pierrot's dungeon, and the King followed her without her knowing it, and hid behind the door, which he set ajar.

Columbine upbraided Pierrot and said, "All this was my work. I have always known that you loved the Queen. And yet for the sake of past days, tell me

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the truth. Was it love or a joke, such as you love to play ? ”

Pierrot laughed inanely. “ It was a joke,” he said. “ It is my trade to make jokes. What else can I do ? ”

“ You love the Queen, nevertheless,” said Columbine, “ of that I am sure, and for that I have had my revenge.”

“ It was a joke,” said Pierrot, and he laughed again.

And though she talked and raved and wept, she could get no other answer from him. Then she left him, and the King entered the dungeon.

“ I have heard what you said,” said the King, “ but to me you must tell the truth. I do not believe it was you who met the Queen in the temple ; tell me the truth, and your life shall be spared.”

“ It was a joke,” said Pierrot, and he laughed. Then the King grew fierce and stormed and threatened. But his rage and threats were in vain ! for Pierrot only laughed. Then the King appealed to him as man to man, and implored him to tell him the truth ; for he would have given his kingdom to believe that it was the real Pierrot who had met the Queen, and that the adventure had been a joke. Pierrot only repeated what he had said, and laughed and giggled inanely.

At dawn the prison door was opened, and three masked men led Pierrot out through the courtyard into the garden. The revellers had gone home, but here and there lights still twinkled and flickered and a stray note or two of music were still heard. Some of the latest of the revellers were going home. The dawn was grey and chilly ; they led Pierrot through the alleys to the grass amphitheatre, and they hanged him on the horizontal beam which formed part of the primitive proscenium where he and Columbine had danced so wildly in the night. They hanged him, and his white figure dangled

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from the beam as though he were still dancing ; and the new Pierrot, who was appointed the next day, was told that such would be the fate of all mummers who went too far, and whose jokes and pranks overstepped the limits of decency and good breeding.

THE GARLAND

THE *Referendarius* had three junior clerks to carry on the business of his department, and they in their turn were assisted by two scribes, who did most of the copying and kept the records. The work of the Department consisted in filing and annotating the petitions and cases which were referred from the lower Courts, through the channel of the *Referendarius*, to the Emperor.

The three clerks and their two scribes occupied a high marble room in the spacious office. It was as yet early in April, but, nevertheless, the sun out of doors was almost fierce. The high marble rooms of the office were cool and stuffy at the same time, and the spring sunshine without, the soft breeze from the sea, the call of the flower-sellers in the street, and the lazy murmur of the town had, in these shaded, musty, and parchment-smelling halls, diffused an atmosphere of laziness which inspired the clerks with an overwhelming desire to do nothing.

There was, indeed, no pressing work on hand. Only from time to time the *Referendarius*, who occupied a room to himself next door to theirs, would communicate with them through a hole in the wall, demanding information on some point or asking to be supplied with certain documents. Then the clerks would make a momentary pretence of being busy, and ultimately the scribes would find either the documents or the information which were required.

As it was, the clerks were all of them engaged in

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occupations which were remote from official work. The eldest of them, Cephalus by name—a man who was distinguished from the others by a certain refined sobriety both in his dark dress and in his quiet demeanour—was reading a treatise on algebra ; the second, Theophilus, a musician, whose tunic was as bright as his flaming hair, was mending a small organ ; and the third, Rufinus, a rather pale, shortsighted, and untidy youth, was scribbling on a tablet. The scribes were busy sorting old records and putting them away in their permanent places.

Presently an official strolled in from another department. He was a middle-aged, corpulent, and cheerful-looking man, dressed in gaudy coloured tissue, on which all manner of strange birds were depicted. He was bursting with news.

“ Phocas is going to win,” he said. “ It is certain.”

Cephalus looked vaguely up from his book and said, “ Oh ! ”

Theophilus and Rufinus paid no attention to the remark.

“ Well,” continued the newcomer cheerfully, “ who will come to the races with me ? ”

As soon as he heard the word “ races,” Rufinus looked up from his scribbling. “ I will come,” he said, “ if I can get leave.”

“ I did not know you cared for that sort of thing,” said Cephalus.

Rufinus blushed and murmured something about going every now and then. He walked out of the room, and sought the *Referendarius* in the next room. This official was reading a document. He did not look up when Rufinus entered, but went on with his reading. At last, after a prolonged interval, he turned round and said, “ What is it ? ”

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"May I go to the races?" asked Rufinus.

"Well," said the high official, "what about your work?"

"We've finished everything," said the clerk.

The Head of the Department assumed an air of mystery and coughed.

"I don't think I can very well see my way to letting you go," he said. "I am very sorry," he added quickly, "and if it depended on me you should go at once. But He," he added—he always alluded to the Head of the Office as He—"does not like it. He may come in any moment and find you gone. Besides, there's that index to go on with. No; I'm afraid I can't let you go to-day. Now, if it had been yesterday you could have gone."

"I should only be away an hour," said Rufinus tentatively.

"*He* might choose just that hour to come round. If it depended only on me you should go at once," and he laughed and slapped Rufinus on the back jocularly.

The clerk did not press the point further.

"You'd better get on with that index," said the high official as Rufinus withdrew.

He told the result of his interview to his sporting friend, who started out by himself to the Hippodrome.

Rufinus settled down to his index. But he soon fell into a mood of abstraction. The races and the games did not interest him in the least. It was something else which attracted him. And, as he sat musing, the vision of the Hippodrome as he had last seen it rose clearly before him. He saw the seaweed-coloured marble; the glistening porticoes, adorned with the masterpieces of Greece, crowded with women in gemmed embroideries and men in white tunics hemmed with broad purple; he saw the Generals with their barbaric officers—Bulgarians, Persians, Arabs, Slavs—the long line of savage-looking

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prisoners in their chains, and the golden breastplates of the standard-bearers. He saw the immense silk *velum* floating in the azure air over that rippling sea of men, those hundreds of thousands who swarmed on the marble steps of the Hippodrome. He saw the Emperor in his high-pillared box, on his circular throne of dull gold, surrounded by slaves fanning him with jewel-coloured plumes, and fenced round with golden swords.

And opposite him, on the other side of the Stadium, the Empress, mantled in a stiff pontifical robe, laden with heavy embroidered stuffs, her little head framed like a portrait in a square crown of gold and diamonds, whence chains of emeralds hung down to her breast ; motionless as an idol, impassive as a gilded mummy.

He saw the crowd of gorgeous women, grouped like Eastern flowers around her : he saw one woman. He saw one form as fresh as a lily of the valley, all white amidst that hard metallic splendour ; frail as a dewy anemone, slender as the moist narcissus. He saw one face like the chalice of a rose, and amidst all those fiery jewels two large eyes as soft as dark violets. And the sumptuous Court, the plumes, the swords, the standards, the hot, many-coloured crowd melted away and disappeared, so that when the Emperor rose and made the sign of the Cross over his people, first to the right, then to the left, and thirdly over the half-circle behind him, and the singers of Saint Sofia and the Church of the Holy Apostles mingled their bass chant with the shrill trebles of the chorus of the Hippodrome, to the sound of silver organs, he thought that the great hymn of praise was rising to her and to her alone ; and that men had come from the uttermost parts of the earth to pay homage to her, to sing her praise, to kneel to her—to her, the wondrous, the very beautiful : peerless, radiant, perfect.

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A voice, followed by a cough, called from the hole in the wall ; but Rufinus paid no heed, so deeply sunk was he in his vision.

“ Rufinus, the Chief is calling you,” said Cephalus.

Rufinus started, and hurried to the hole in the wall. The Head of the Department gave him a message for an official in another department.

Rufinus hurried with the message downstairs and delivered it. On his way back he passed the main portico on the ground floor. He walked out into the street : it was empty. Everybody was at the games.

A dark-skinned country girl passed him singing a song about the swallow and the spring. She was bearing a basket full of anemones, violets, narcissi, wild roses, and lilies of the valley.

“ Will you sell me your flowers ? ” he asked, and he held out a silver coin.

“ You are welcome to them,” said the girl. “ I do not need your money.”

He took the flowers and returned to the room upstairs. The flowers filled the stuffy place with an unwonted and wonderful fragrance.

Then he sat down and appeared to be once more busily engrossed in his index. But side by side with the index he had a small tablet, and on this, every now and then, he added or erased a word to a short poem in six lines. The poem began thus :

πέμπω σοί, Ῥοδόκλεια, τόδε στέφος.

The sense of it was something like this :

“ Rhodocleia, flowers of spring
I have woven in a ring ;
Take this wreath, my offering.

THE GARLAND

Here's the lily, here the rose
Her full chalice shall disclose ;
Here's narcissus wet with dew,
Windflower and the violet blue.
Wear the garland I have made ;
Crowned with it, put pride away ;
This wreath that blooms to-day must fade ;
Thou thyself must fade some day."

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I

JOHN FLETCHER was an overworked minor official in a Government office. He lived a lonely life, and had done so ever since he had been a boy. At school he had mixed little with his fellow-schoolboys, and he took no interest in the things that interested them, that is to say, games. On the other hand, although he was what is called "good at work," and did his lessons with facility and speed, he was not a literary boy, and did not care for books. He was drawn towards machinery of all kinds, and spent his spare time in dabbling in scientific experiments or in watching trains go by on the Great Western line. Once he blew off his eyebrows while making some experiment with explosive chemicals; his hands were always smudged with dark, mysterious stains, and his room was like that of a mediæval alchemist, littered with retorts, bottles, and test-tubes. Before leaving school he invented a flying-machine (heavier than air), and an unsuccessful attempt to start it on the high road caused him to be the victim of much chaff and ridicule.

When he left school he went to Oxford. His life there was as lonely as it had been at school. The dirty, untidy, ink-stained, and chemical-stained little boy grew up into a tall, lank, slovenly-dressed man, who kept entirely to himself, not because he cherished any dislike or disdain for his fellow-creatures, but because he seemed

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to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts and isolated from the world by a barrier of dreams.

He did well at Oxford, and when he went down he passed high into the Civil Service and became a clerk in a Government office. There he kept as much to himself as ever. He did his work rapidly and well, for this man, who seemed so slovenly in his person, had an accurate mind, and was what was called a good clerk, although his incurable absent-mindedness once or twice caused him to forget certain matters of importance.

His fellow-clerks treated him as a crank and as a joke, but none of them, try as they would, could get to know him or win his confidence. They used to wonder what Fletcher did with his spare time, what were his pursuits, what were his hobbies, if he had any. They suspected that Fletcher had some hobby of an engrossing kind, since in everyday life he was like a man who is walking in his sleep, and who acts mechanically and automatically. Somewhere else, they thought, in some other circumstances, he must surely wake up and take a living interest in somebody or in something.

Yet had they followed him home to his small room in Canterbury Mansions they would have been astonished. For when he returned from the office after a hard day's work he would do nothing more engrossing than slowly to turn over the leaves of a book in which there were elaborate drawings and diagrams of locomotives and other engines. And on Sunday he would take a train to one of the large junctions and spend the whole day in watching express trains go past, and in the evening would return again to London.

One day after he had returned from the office somewhat earlier than usual, he was telephoned for. He had no telephone in his own room, but he could use a public

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telephone which was attached to the building. He went into the small box, but found on reaching the telephone that he had been cut off by the exchange. He imagined that he had been rung up by the office, so he asked to be given their number. As he did so his eye caught an advertisement which was hung just over the telephone. It was an elaborate design in black and white, pointing out the merits of a particular kind of soap called the Venus : a classical lady, holding a looking-glass in one hand and a cake of this invaluable soap in the other, was standing in a sphere surrounded by pointed rays, which was no doubt intended to represent the most brilliant of the planets.

Fletcher sat down on the stool and took the receiver in his hand. As he did so he had for one second the impression that the floor underneath him gave way and that he was falling down a precipice. But before he had time to realise what was happening the sensation of falling left him ; he shook himself as though he had been asleep, and for one moment a faint recollection as though of the dreams of the night twinkled in his mind, and vanished beyond all possibility of recall. He said to himself that he had had a long and curious dream, and he knew that it was too late to remember what it had been about. Then he opened his eyes wide and looked round him.

He was standing on the slope of a hill. At his feet there was a green moss, very soft to tread on. It was sprinkled here and there with light red, wax-like flowers such as he had never seen before. He was standing in an open space ; beneath him there was a plain covered with what seemed to be gigantic mushrooms, much taller than a man. Above him rose a mass of vegetation, and over all this was a dense, heavy,

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streaming cloud faintly glimmering with a white, silvery light which seemed to be beyond it.

He walked towards the vegetation, and soon found himself in the middle of a wood, or rather of a jungle. Tangled plants grew on every side ; large hanging creepers with great blue flowers hung downwards. There was a profound stillness in this wood ; there were no birds singing and he heard not the slightest rustle in the rich undergrowth. It was oppressively hot, and the air was full of a pungent, aromatic sweetness. He felt as though he were in a hothouse full of gardenias and stephanotis. At the same time the atmosphere of the place was pleasant to him. It was neither strange nor disagreeable. He felt at home in this green, shimmering jungle in this hot, aromatic twilight, as though he had lived there all his life.

He walked mechanically onwards as if he were going to a definite spot of which he knew. He walked fast, but in spite of the oppressive atmosphere and the thickness of the growth he grew neither hot nor out of breath ; on the contrary, he took pleasure in the motion, and the stifling, sweet air seemed to invigorate him. He walked steadily on for over three hours, choosing his way nicely, avoiding certain places and seeking others, following a definite path and making for a definite goal. During all this time the stillness continued unbroken, nor did he meet a single living thing, either bird or beast.

After he had been walking for what seemed to him several hours, the vegetation grew thinner, the jungle less dense, and from a more or less open space in it he seemed to discern what might have been a mountain entirely submerged in a mass of heavy grey cloud. He sat down on the green stuff which was like grass and yet was not grass, at the edge of the open space whence he got this view, and quite naturally he picked from the

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boughs of an overhanging tree a large red, juicy fruit, and ate it. Then he said to himself, he knew not why, that he must not waste time, but must be moving on.

He took a path to the right of him, and descended the sloping jungle with big, buoyant strides, almost running ; he knew the way as though he had been down that path a thousand times. He knew that in a few moments he would reach a whole hanging garden of red flowers, and he knew that when he had reached this he must again turn to the right. It was as he thought : the red flowers soon came into sight. He turned sharply, and through the thinning greenery he caught sight of an open plain where more mushrooms grew. But the plain was as yet a great way off, and the mushrooms seemed quite small.

"I shall get there in time," he said to himself, and walked steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It was evening by the time he reached the edge of the plain : everything was growing dark. The endless vapours and the high banks of cloud in which the whole of this world was sunk grew dimmer and dimmer. In front of him was an empty level space, and about two miles farther on the huge mushrooms stood out, tall and wide, like the monuments of some prehistoric age. And underneath them on the soft carpet there seemed to move a myriad vague and shadowy forms.

"I shall get there in time," he thought. He walked on for another half-hour, and by this time the tall mushrooms were quite close to him, and he could see moving underneath them, distinctly now, green, living creatures like huge caterpillars, with glowing eyes. They moved slowly and did not seem to interfere with each other in any way. Farther off, and beyond them, there was a broad and endless plain of high green stalks like ears of green wheat or millet, only taller and thinner.

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He ran on, and now at his very feet, right in front of him, the green caterpillars were moving. They were as big as leopards. As he drew nearer they seemed to make way for him, and to gather themselves into groups under the thick stems of the mushrooms. He walked along the pathway they made for him, under the shadow of the broad, sunshade-like roofs of these gigantic growths. It was almost dark now, yet he had no doubt or difficulty as to finding his way. He was making for the green plain beyond. The ground was dense with caterpillars ; they were as plentiful as ants in an ant's nest, and yet they never seemed to interfere with each other or with him ; they instinctively made way for him, nor did they appear to notice him in any way. He felt neither surprise nor wonder at their presence.

It grew quite dark ; the only lights which were in this world came from the twinkling eyes of the moving figures, which shone like little stars. The night was no whit cooler than the day. The atmosphere was as steamy, as dense, and as aromatic as before. He walked on and on, feeling no trace of fatigue or hunger, and every now and then he said to himself, " I shall be there in time." The plain was flat and level, and covered the whole way with the mushrooms, whose roofs met and shut out from him the sight of the dark sky.

At last he came to the end of the plain of mushrooms and reached the high green stalks he had been making for. Beyond the dark clouds a silver glimmer had begun once more to show itself. " I am just in time," he said to himself ; " the night is over, the sun is rising."

At that moment there was a great whirl in the air, and from out of the green stalks rose a flight of millions and millions of enormous broad-winged butterflies of every hue and description—silver, gold, purple, brown, and

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blue. Some with dark and velvety wings like the Purple Emperor, or the Red Admiral, others diaphanous and iridescent as dragon-flies. Others again like vast soft and silvery moths. They rose from every part of that green plain of stalks, they filled the sky, and then soared upwards and disappeared into the silvery cloudland.

Fletcher was about to leap forward when he heard a voice in his ear saying :

"Are you 6493 Victoria? You are talking to the Home Office."

II

As soon as Fletcher heard the voice of the office messenger through the telephone he instantly realised his surroundings, and the strange experience he had just gone through, which had seemed so long and which in reality had been so brief, left little more impression on him than that which remains with a man who has been immersed in a brown study or who has been staring at something, say a poster in the street, and has not noticed the passage of time.

The next day he returned to his work at the office, and his fellow-clerks, during the whole of the next week, noticed that he was more zealous and more painstaking than ever. On the other hand, his periodical fits of abstraction grew more frequent and more pronounced. On one occasion he took a paper to the Head of the Department for signature, and after it had been signed, instead of removing it from the table, he remained staring in front of him, and it was not until the Head of the Department had called him three times loudly by name that he took any notice and regained possession of his faculties. As these fits of absent-mindedness grew to be somewhat severely commented on, he consulted a doctor,

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who told him that what he needed was change of air, and advised him to spend his Sundays at Brighton or at some other bracing and exhilarating spot. Fletcher did not take the doctor's advice, but continued spending his spare time as he did before—that is to say, in going to some big junction and watching the express trains go by all day long.

One day while he was thus employed—it was Sunday, in August of 19—, when the Egyptian Exhibition was attracting great crowds of visitors—and sitting, as was his habit, on a bench on the centre platform of Slough Station, he noticed an Indian pacing up and down the platform, who every now and then stopped and regarded him with peculiar interest, hesitating as though he wished to speak to him. Presently the Indian came and sat down on the same bench, and after having sat there in silence for some minutes he at last made a remark about the heat.

“Yes,” said Fletcher, “it is trying, especially for people like myself, who have to remain in London during these months.”

“You are in an office, no doubt,” said the Indian.

“Yes,” said Fletcher.

“And you are no doubt hard worked.”

“Our hours are not long,” Fletcher replied, “and I should not complain of overwork if I did not happen to suffer from—well, I don't know what it is, but I suppose they would call it nerves.”

“Yes,” said the Indian; “I could see that by your eyes.”

“I am a prey to sudden fits of abstraction,” said Fletcher; “they are growing upon me. Sometimes in the office I forget where I am altogether for a space of about two or three minutes; people are beginning to notice it and to talk about it. I have been to a doctor, and he said

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I needed change of air. I shall have my leave in about a month's time, and then perhaps I shall get some change of air, but I doubt if it will do me any good. But these fits are annoying, and once something quite uncanny seemed to happen to me."

The Indian showed great interest and asked for further details concerning this strange experience, and Fletcher told him all that he could recall—for the memory of it was already dimmed—of what had happened when he had telephoned that night.

The Indian was thoughtful for a while after hearing this tale. At last he said, "I am not a doctor, I am not even what you call a quack doctor—I am a mere conjurer, and I gain my living by conjuring tricks and fortune-telling at the Exhibition which is going on in London. But although I am a poor man and an ignorant man, I have an inkling, a few sparks in me of the ancient knowledge, and I know what is the matter with you."

"What is it?" asked Fletcher.

"You have the power, or something has the power," said the Indian, "of detaching you from your actual body, and your astral body has been in another planet. By your description I think it must be the planet Venus. It may happen to you again, and for a longer period—for a very much longer period."

"Is there anything I can do to prevent it?" asked Fletcher.

"Nothing," said the Indian. "You can try change of air if you like, but," he said, with a smile, "I do not think it will do you much good."

At that moment a train came in, and the Indian said good-bye and jumped into it.

On the next day, which was Monday, when Fletcher got to the office it was necessary for him to use the

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telephone. No sooner had he taken off the receiver than he vividly recalled the minute details of the evening he had telephoned, when the strange experience had come to him. The advertisement of Venus soap that had hung in the telephone box in his house appeared distinctly before him, and as he thought of that he once more experienced a falling sensation which lasted only a fraction of a second, and rubbing his eyes he awoke to find himself in the tepid atmosphere of a green and humid world.

This time he was not near the wood, but on the seashore. In front of him was a grey sea, smooth as oil and clouded with steaming vapours, and behind him the wide green plain stretched into a cloudy distance. He could discern, faint on the far-off horizon, the shadowy forms of the gigantic mushrooms which he knew; and on the level plain, which reached the seabeach, but not so far off as the mushrooms, he could plainly see the huge green caterpillars moving slowly and lazily in an endless herd. The sea was breaking on the sand with a faint moan. But almost at once he became aware of another sound, which came he knew not whence, and which was familiar to him. It was a low whistling noise, and it seemed to come from the sky.

At that moment Fletcher was seized by an unaccountable panic. He was afraid of something; he did not know what it was, but he knew, he felt absolutely certain, that some danger, no vague calamity, no distant misfortune, but some definite physical danger was hanging over him and quite close to him—something from which it would be necessary to run away, and to run fast in order to save his life. And yet there was no sign of danger visible, for in front of him was the motionless oily sea, and behind him was the empty and silent plain. It was

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then he noticed that the caterpillars were fast disappearing, as if into the earth : he was too far off to make out how.

He began to run along the coast. He ran as fast as he could, but he dared not look round. He ran back from the coast along the plain, from which a white mist was rising. By this time every single caterpillar had disappeared. The whistling noise continued and grew louder.

At last he reached the wood and bounded on, trampling down long trailing grasses and tangled weeds through the thick, muggy gloom of those endless aisles of jungle. He came to a somewhat open space where there was the trunk of a tree larger than the others ; it stood by itself and disappeared into the tangle of creepers above. He thought he would climb the tree, but the trunk was too wide, and his efforts failed. He stood by the tree trembling and panting with fear. He could not hear a sound, but he felt that the danger, whatever it was, was at hand.

It grew darker and darker. It was night in the forest. He stood paralysed with terror ; he felt as though bound hand and foot, but there was nothing to be done except to wait until his invisible enemy should choose to inflict his will on him and achieve his doom. And yet the agony of this suspense was so terrible that he felt that if it lasted much longer something must inevitably break inside him . . . and just as he was thinking that eternity could not be so long as the moments he was passing through, a blessed unconsciousness came over him. He woke from this state to find himself face to face with one of the office messengers, who said to him that he had been given his number two or three times but had taken no notice of it.

Fletcher executed his commission and then went upstairs to his office. His fellow-clerks at once asked what

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had happened to him, for he was looking white. He said that he had a headache and was not feeling quite himself, but made no further explanation.

This last experience changed the whole tenor of his life. When fits of abstraction had occurred to him before he had not troubled about them, and after his first strange experience he had felt only vaguely interested; but now it was a different matter. He was consumed with dread lest the thing should occur again. He did not want to get back to that green world and that oily sea; he did not want to hear the whistling noise, nor to be pursued by an invisible enemy. So much did the dread of this weigh on him that he refused to go to the telephone lest the act of telephoning should set alight in his mind the train of associations and bring his thoughts back to his dreadful experience.

Shortly after this he went for leave, and following the doctor's advice he spent it by the sea. During all this time he was perfectly well, and was not once troubled by his curious fits. He returned to London in the autumn refreshed and well.

On the first day that he went to the office a friend of his telephoned to him. When he was told that the line was being held for him he hesitated, but at last he went down to the telephone office.

He remained away twenty minutes. Finally his prolonged absence was noticed, and he was sent for. He was found in the telephone room stiff and unconscious, having fallen forward on the telephone desk. His face was quite white, and his eyes wide open and glazed with an expression of piteous and harrowing terror. When they tried to revive him their efforts were in vain. A doctor was sent for, and he said that Fletcher had died of heart disease.

DR. FAUST'S LAST DAY

THE Doctor got up at dawn, as was his wont, and as soon as he was dressed he sat down at his desk in his library overlooking the sea, and immersed himself in the studies which were the lodestar of his existence. His hours were mapped out with rigid regularity like those of a schoolboy, and his methodical life worked as though by clockwork. He rose at dawn and read without interruption until eight o'clock. He then partook of some light food (he was a strict vegetarian), after which he walked in the garden of his house, overlooking the Bay of Naples, until ten. From ten to twelve he received sick people, peasants from the village, or any visitors that needed his advice or his company. At twelve he ate a frugal meal. From one o'clock until three he enjoyed a siesta. At three he resumed his studies, which continued without interruption until six, when he partook of a second meal. At seven he took another stroll in the village or by the seashore and remained out of doors until nine. He then withdrew into his study, and at midnight went to bed.

It was, perhaps, the extreme regularity of his life, combined with the strict diet which he observed, that accounted for his good health. This day was his seventieth birthday, and his body was as vigorous and his mind as alert as they had been in his fortieth year. His thick hair and beard were scarcely grey, and the wrinkles on his white, thoughtful face were rare. Yet the Doctor, when questioned as to the secret of his youthfulness, being

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like many learned men fond of a paradox, used to reply that diet and regularity had nothing to do with it, and that the Southern sun and the climate of the Neapolitan coast, which he had chosen among all places to be the abode of his old age, were in reality responsible for his excellent health.

"I lead a regular life," he used to say, "not in order to keep well, but in order to get through my work. Unless my hours were mapped out regularly I should be the prey of every idler in the place, and I should never get any work done at all."

On this day, as it was his seventieth birthday, the Doctor had asked a few friends to share his midday meal, and when he returned from his morning stroll he sent for his housekeeper to give her a few final instructions. The housekeeper, who was a voluble Italian peasant-woman, after receiving his orders, handed him a piece of paper on which a few words were scrawled in reddish-brown ink, saying it had been left by a Signore.

"What Signore?" asked the Doctor, as he perused the document, which consisted of words in the German tongue to the effect that the writer regretted his absence from the Doctor's feast, but would call at midnight. It was not signed.

"He was a Signore, like all Signores," said the housekeeper; "he just left the letter and went away."

The Doctor was puzzled, and in spite of much cross-examination he was unable to extract anything more beyond the fact that he was a "Signore."

"Shall I lay one place less?" asked the housekeeper.

"Certainly not," said the Doctor. "All my guests will be present." And he threw the piece of paper on the table.

The housekeeper left the room, but she had not been

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gone many minutes before she returned and said that Maria, the wife of the late Giovanni, the baker, wished to speak to him. The Doctor nodded, and Maria burst into the room, sobbing.

When her tears had somewhat subsided she told her story in broken sentences. Her daughter, Margherita, who was seventeen years old, had been allowed to spend the summer at Sorrento with her late father's sister. There, it appeared, she had met a "Signore," who had given her jewels, made love to her, promised her marriage, and held clandestine meetings with her. Her aunt professed now to have been unaware of this; but Maria assured the Doctor that her sister-in-law, who had the evil eye and had more than once trafficked with Satan, must have had knowledge of the business, even if she were not directly responsible, which was highly probable. In the meantime, Margherita's brother Anselmo had returned from the wars in the North, and, discovering the truth, had sworn to kill the Signore unless he married Margherita.

"And what do you wish me to do?" asked the Doctor, after he had listened to the story.

"Anything, anything," she answered, "only calm my son Anselmo, or else there will be a disaster."

"Who is the Signore?" asked the Doctor.

"The Conte Guido da Siena," she answered.

The Doctor reflected a moment, and then said, "I will see what can be done. The matter can be arranged. Send your son to me later." And then, after scolding Maria for not having taken proper care of her daughter, he sent her away.

As he did so he caught sight of the dirty piece of paper on his table. For one second he had the impression that the letters on it were written in blood, and he shivered,

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but the momentary hallucination and sense of discomfort passed immediately.

At midday the guests arrived. They consisted of Dr. Cornelius, Vienna's most learned scholar ; Taddeo Mainardi, the painter ; a Danish student from the University of Wittenberg ; a young English nobleman, who was travelling in Italy ; and Guido da Siena, philosopher and poet, who was said to be the handsomest man in Italy. The Doctor set before his guests a precious wine from Cyprus, in which he toasted them, although as a rule he drank only water. The meal was served in the cool loggia overlooking the bay, and the talk, which was of the men and books of many climes, flowed like a rippling stream on which the sunshine of laughter lightly played.

The student asked the Doctor whether in Italy men of taste took any interest in the recent experiments of a French Huguenot, who professed to be able to send people into a trance. Moreover, the patient when in the trance, so it was alleged, was able to act as a bridge between the material and the spiritual worlds, and the dead could be summoned and made to speak through the unconscious patient.

"We take no thought of such things here," said the Doctor. "In my youth, when I studied in the North, experiments of that nature exercised a powerful sway over my mind. I dabbled in alchemy ; I tried and indeed considered that I succeeded in raising spirits and visions ; but two things are necessary for such a study : youth, and the mists of the Northern country. Here the generous sun kills such fantasies. There are no phantoms here. Moreover, I am convinced that in all such experiments success depends on the state of mind of the inquirer, which not only persuades, but indeed compels

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itself by a strange magnetic quality to see the vision it desires. In my youth I considered that I had evoked visions of Satan and Helen of Troy, and what not—such things are fit for the young. We greybeards have more serious things to occupy us, and when a man has one foot in the grave, he has no time to waste.”

“To my mind,” said the painter, “this world has sufficient beauty and mystery to satisfy the most ardent inquirer.”

“But,” said the Englishman, “is not this world a phantom and a dream as insubstantial as the visions of the ardent mind?”

“Men and women are the only study fit for a man,” interrupted Guido; “and as for the philosopher’s stone, I have found it. I found it some months ago in a garden at Sorrento. It is a pearl radiant with all the hues of the rainbow.”

“With regard to that matter,” said the Doctor, “we will have some talk later. The wench’s brother has returned from the war. We must find her a husband.”

“You misunderstand me,” said Guido. “You do not think I am going to throw my precious pearl to the swine? I have sworn to wed Margherita, and wed her I shall, and that swiftly.”

“Such an act of folly would only lead,” said the Doctor, “to your unhappiness and to hers. It is the selfish act of a fool. You must not think of it.”

“Ah!” said Guido, “you are young at seventy, Doctor, but you were old at twenty-five, and you cannot know what these things mean.”

“I was young in my day,” said the Doctor, “and I found many such pearls; believe me, they are all very well in their native shell. To move them is to destroy their beauty.”

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"You do not understand," said Guido. "I have loved countless times ; but she is different. You never felt the revelation of the real, true thing that is different from all the rest and transforms a man's life."

"No," said the Doctor, "I confess that to me it was always the same thing." And for the second time that day the Doctor shivered, he knew not why.

Soon after the meal was over the guests departed, and although the Doctor detained Guido and endeavoured to persuade him to listen to the voice of reason and common sense, his efforts were in vain. Guido had determined to wed Margherita.

"Besides which, if I left her now, I should bring shame and ruin on her," he said.

The Doctor started—a familiar voice seemed to whisper in his ear, "She is not the first one." A strange shudder passed through him, and he distinctly heard a mocking voice laughing. "Go your way," he said, "but do not come and complain to me if you bring unhappiness on yourself and her."

Guido departed and the Doctor retired to enjoy his siesta.

For the first time during all the years he had lived at Naples the Doctor was not able to sleep. "This and the hallucinations I have suffered from to-day come from drinking that Cyprus wine," he said to himself.

He lay in the darkened room tossing uneasily on his bed, and sleep would not come to him. Stranger still, before his eyes fiery letters seemed to dance before him in the air. At seven o'clock he went out into the garden. Never had he beheld a more glorious evening. He strolled down towards the seashore and watched the sunset. Mount Vesuvius seemed to have dissolved into a rosy haze ; the waves of the sea were phosphorescent.

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A fisherman was singing in his boat. The sky was an apocalypse of glory and peace.

The Doctor sighed and watched the pageant of light until it faded and the stars lit up the magical blue darkness. Then out of the night came another song—a song which seemed familiar to the Doctor, although for the moment he could not place it, about a King in the Northern Country who was faithful to the grave and to whom his dying mistress a golden beaker gave.

“Strange,” thought the Doctor; “it must come from some Northern fishing smack,” and he went home.

He sat reading in his study until midnight, and for the first time in thirty years he could not fix his mind on his book. For the vision of the sunset and the song of the Northern fisherman, which in some unaccountable way brought back to him the days of his youth, kept on surging up in his mind.

Twelve o'clock struck. He rose to go to bed, and as he did so he heard a loud knock at the door.

“Come in,” said the Doctor, but his voice faltered (“the Cyprus wine again!” he thought), and his heart beat loudly.

The door opened and an icy draught blew into the room. The visitor beckoned, but spoke no word, and Dr. Faust rose and followed him into the outer darkness.

THE IKON

FERROL was an intellectual, and he prided himself on the fact. At Cambridge he had narrowly missed being a Senior Wrangler, and his principal study there had been Lunar Theory. But when he went down from Cambridge for good, being a man of some means, he travelled. For a year he was an honorary Attaché at one of the big Embassies. He finally settled in London with a vague idea of some day writing a *magnum opus* about the stupidity of mankind ; for he had come to the conclusion at the age of twenty-five that all men were stupid, irreclaimably, irredeemably stupid ; that everything was wrong ; that all literature was really bad, all art much overrated, and all music tedious in the long-run.

The years slipped by and he never began his *magnum opus* ; he joined a literary club instead and discussed the current topics of the day. Sometimes he wrote a short article ; never in the daily Press, which he despised, nor in the reviews (for he never wrote anything as long as a magazine article), but in a literary weekly he would express in weary and polished phrases the unemphatic boredom or the mitigated approval with which the works of his fellow-men inspired him. He was the kind of man who had nothing in him you could positively dislike, but to whom you could not talk for five minutes without having a vague sensation of blight. Things seemed to shrivel up in his presence as though they had been touched by an insidious east wind, a subtle frost, a secret chill. He never praised anything, though

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he sometimes condescended to approve. The faint puffs of blame in which he more generally indulged were never sharp or heavy, but were like the smoke rings of a cigarette which a man indolently smoking blows from time to time up to the ceiling.

He lived in rooms in the Temple. They were comfortably, not luxuriously, furnished; a great many French books—French was the only modern language worth reading, he used to say—a few modern German etchings, a low Turkish divan, and some Egyptian antiquities, made up the furniture of his two sitting-rooms. Above all things he despised Greek art; it was, he said, decadent. The Egyptians and the Germans were, in his opinion, the only people who knew anything about the plastic arts, whereas the only music he could endure was that of the modern French School. Over his chimney-piece there was a large German landscape in oils, called *Im Walde*; it represented a wood at twilight in the autumn, and if you looked at it carefully and for a long time you saw that the objects depicted were meant to be trees from which the leaves were falling; but if you looked at the picture carelessly and from a distance, it looked like a man-of-war on a rough sea, for which it was frequently taken, much to Ferrol's annoyance.

One day an artist friend of his presented him with a small Chinese god made of crystal; he put this on his chimney-piece. It was on the evening of the day on which he received this gift that he dined, together with a friend named Sledge who had travelled much in Eastern countries, at his club. After dinner they went to Ferrol's rooms to smoke and to talk. He wanted to show Sledge his antiquities, which consisted of three large Egyptian statuettes, a small green Egyptian god, and the Chinese idol which he had lately been given. Sledge, who was

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a middle-aged, bearded man, frank and unconventional, examined the antiquities with care, pronounced them to be genuine, and singled out for special praise the crystal god.

"Your things are good," he said, "very good. But don't you really mind having all these things about you?"

"Why should I mind?" asked Ferrol.

"Well, you have travelled a good deal, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Ferrol, "I have travelled; I have been as far east as Nizhni-Novgorod to see the Fair, and as far west as Lisbon."

"I suppose," said Sledge, "you were a long time in Greece and Italy?"

"No," said Ferrol, "I have never been to Greece. Greek art distresses me. All classical art is a mistake and a superstition."

"Talking of superstition," said Sledge, "you have never been to the Far East, have you?"

"No," Ferrol answered; "Egypt is Eastern enough for me, and cannot be bettered."

"Well," said Sledge, "I have been in the Far East. I have lived there many years. I am not a superstitious man; but there is one thing I would not do in any circumstances whatsoever, and that is to keep in my sitting-room the things you have got there."

"But why?" asked Ferrol.

"Well," said Sledge, "nearly all of them have come from tombs of the dead, and some of them are gods. Such things may have attached to them Heaven knows what spooks and spirits."

Ferrol shut his eyes and smiled, a faint, seraphic smile. "My dear boy," he said, "you forget. This is the Twentieth Century."

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"And you," answered Sledge, "forget that the things you have here were made before the Twentieth Century, B.C."

"You don't seriously mean," said Ferrol, "that you attach any importance to these——" he hesitated.

"Children's stories?" suggested Sledge.

Ferrol nodded.

"I have lived long enough in the East," said Sledge, "to know that the sooner you learn to believe children's stories the better."

"I am afraid, then," said Ferrol, with civil tolerance, "that our points of view are too different for us to discuss the matter." And they talked of other things until late into the night.

Just as Sledge was leaving Ferrol's rooms and had said "Good-night," he paused a moment by the chimney-piece, and, pointing to a tiny Ikon which was lying on it, asked, "What is that?"

"Oh, that's nothing," said Ferrol, "only a small Ikon I bought for twopence at the Fair of Nizhni-Novgorod."

Sledge said "Good-night" again, but when he was on the stairs he called back, "In any case remember one thing, that East is East and West is West. Don't mix your deities."

Ferrol had not the slightest idea what he was alluding to, nor did he care. He dismissed the matter from his mind.

The next day he spent in the country, returning to London late in the evening. As he entered his rooms the first thing which met his eye was that his great picture, *Im Walde*, which he considered to be one of the few products of modern art that a man who respected himself could look at without positive pain in the eyes, had fallen from its place over the chimney-piece to the

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floor in front of the fender, and the glass was shattered into a thousand fragments. He was much vexed. He sought the cause of the accident. The nail was a strong one, and it was still in its place. The picture had been hung by a wire ; the wire seemed strong also and was not broken. He concluded that the picture must have been badly balanced, and that a sudden shock such as a door banging had thrown it over. He had no servant in his rooms, and when he had gone out that morning he had locked the door, so no one could have entered his rooms during his absence.

Next morning he sent for a framemaker and told him to mend the frame as soon as possible, to make the wire strong, and to see that the picture was firmly fixed on the wall. In two or three days' time the picture returned and was once more hung on the wall over the chimney-piece immediately above the little crystal Chinese god. Ferrol supervised the hanging of the picture in person. He saw that the nail was strong, and firmly fixed in the wall ; he took care that the wire left nothing to be desired and was properly attached to the rings of the picture.

The picture was hung early one morning. That day he went to play golf. He returned at five o'clock, and again the first thing which met his eye was the picture. It had again fallen down, and this time it had brought with it in its fall the small Chinese god, which was broken in two. The glass had again been shattered to bits, and the picture itself was somewhat damaged. Everything else on the chimney-piece, that is to say, a few matchboxes and two candlesticks, had also been thrown to the ground—everything with the exception of the little Ikon he had bought at Nizhni-Novgorod, a small object about two inches square, on which two

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Saints were pictured. This still rested in its place against the wall.

Ferrol investigated the disaster. The nail was in its place in the wall ; the wire at the back of the picture was not broken or damaged in any way. The accident seemed to him quite inexplicable. He was greatly annoyed. The Chinese god was a valuable thing. He stood in front of the chimney-piece contemplating the damage with a sense of great irritation.

"To think that everything should have been broken except this beastly little Ikon!" he said to himself. "I wonder whether that was what Sledge meant when he said I should not mix my deities."

Next morning he sent again for the framemaker, and abused him roundly. The framemaker said he could not understand how the accident had happened. The nail was an excellent nail, the picture, Mr. Ferrol must admit, had been hung with great care before his very eyes and under his own direct and personal supervision. What more could be done?

"It's something to do with the balance," said Ferrol. "I told you that before. The picture is half spoiled now."

The framemaker said the damage would not show once the glass was repaired, and took the picture away again to mend it. A few days later it was brought back. Two men came to fix it this time ; steps were brought, and the hanging lasted about twenty minutes. Nails were put under the picture ; it was hung by a double wire. All accidents in the future seemed guarded against.

The following morning Ferrol telephoned to Sledge and asked him to dine with him. Sledge was engaged to dine out that evening, but said that he would look in at the Temple late after dinner.

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Ferrol dined alone at the Club ; he reached his rooms about half-past nine ; he made up a blazing fire and drew an arm-chair near it. He lit a cigarette, made some Turkish coffee, and took down a French novel. Every now and then he looked up at his picture. No damage was visible ; it looked, he thought, as well as ever. In the place of the Chinese idol he had put his little green Egyptian god on the chimney-piece. The candlesticks and the Ikon were still in their places.

"After all," thought Ferrol, "I did wrong to have any Chinese art in the place at all. Egyptian things are the only things worth having. It is a lesson to me not to dabble with things out of my period."

After he had read for about a quarter of an hour he fell into a doze.

Sledge arrived at the rooms about half-past ten, and an ugly sight met his eyes. There had been an accident. The picture over the chimney-piece had fallen down right on Ferrol. His face was badly cut. He was unconscious. Sledge telephoned for a doctor. They put Ferrol to bed, and his wounds were seen to and everything that was necessary was done. A nurse was sent for to look after him, and Sledge decided to stay in the house all night. After all the arrangements had been made, the doctor, before he went away, said to Sledge, "He will recover all right, he is not in the slightest danger ; but I don't know who is to break the news to him."

"What is that ?" asked Sledge.

"He will be quite blind," said the doctor.

Then the doctor went away, and Sledge sat down in front of the fire. The broken glass had been swept up. The picture had been placed on the Oriental divan, and as Sledge looked at the chimney-piece he noticed that the

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little Ikon was still in its place. Something caught his eye just under the low fender in front of the fireplace. He bent forward and picked up the object.

It was Ferrol's green Egyptian god, which had been broken into two pieces.

THE THIEF

HART MINOR and Smith were behindhand with their sums. It was Hart Minor's first term : Smith had already been one term at school. They were in the fourth division at St. James's. A certain number of sums in short division had to be finished. Hart Minor and Smith got up early to finish these sums before breakfast, which was at half-past seven. Hart Minor divided slowly, and Smith reckoned quickly. Smith finished his sums with ease. When half-past seven struck, Hart Minor had finished four of them and there was still a fifth left : 3888 had to be divided by 36 ; short division had to be employed. Hart Minor was busily trying to divide 3888 by 4 and by 9 ; he had got as far as saying, " Four's into thirty-eight will go six times and two over ; four's into twenty-eight go seven times ; four's into eight go twice." He was beginning to divide 672 by 9, an impossible task, when the breakfast bell rang, and Smith said to him, " Come on ! "

" I can't," said Hart Minor ; " I haven't finished my sum."

Smith glanced at his page and said, " Oh, that's all right, don't you see ? The answer's 108."

Hart Minor wrote down 108 and put a large R next to the sum, which meant Right.

The boys went in to breakfast. After breakfast they returned to the fourth division schoolroom, where they were to be instructed in arithmetic for an hour by Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead called for the sums. He

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glanced through Smith's and found them correct, and then through Hart Minor's. His attention was arrested by the last division.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Four's into thirty-eight don't go six times. You've got the right answer and the wrong working. What does this mean?" And Mr. Whitehead bit his knuckles savagely. "Somebody," he said, "has been helping you."

Hart Minor owned that he had received help from Smith. Mr. Whitehead shook him violently, and said, "Do you know what this means?"

Hart Minor had no sort of idea as to the inner significance of his act, except that he had finished his sums.

"It means," said Mr. Whitehead, "that you're a cheat and a thief: you've been stealing marks. For the present you can stand on the stool of penitence and I'll see what is to be done with you later."

The stool of penitence was a high, three-cornered stool, very narrow at the top. When boys in this division misbehaved themselves they had to stand on it during the rest of the lesson in the middle of the room.

Hart Minor fetched the stool of penitence and climbed up on it. It wobbled horribly.

After the lesson, which was punctuated throughout by Mr. Whitehead with bitter comments on the enormity of theft, the boys went to chapel. Smith and Hart were in the choir: they wore white surplices which were put on in the vestry. Hart Minor, who knew that he was in for a terrific row of some kind, thought he observed something unusual in the conduct of the masters who were assembled in the vestry. They were all tittering. Mr. Whitehead seemed to be convulsed with uncontrollable laughter. The choir walked up the aisle. Hart Minor noticed that all the boys in the school, and the servants

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who sat behind them, and the master's wife who sat in front, and the organist who played the harmonium, were all staring at him with unwonted interest ; the boys were nudging each other : he could not understand why.

When the service, which lasted twenty minutes, was over, and the boys came out of chapel, Hart Minor was the centre of a jeering crowd of boys. He asked Smith what the cause of this was, and Smith confessed to him that before going into chapel Mr. Whitehead had pinned on his back a large sheet of paper with " Cheat " written on it, and had only removed it just before the procession walked up the aisle, hence the interest aroused. But, contrary to his expectation, nothing further occurred ; none of the masters alluded to his misdemeanour, and Hart Minor almost thought that the incident was closed—almost, and yet really not at all ; he tried to delude himself into thinking the affair would blow over, but all the while at the bottom of his heart sat a horrible misgiving.

Every Monday there was in this school what was called " reading over." The boys all assembled in the library, and the Headmaster, standing in front of his tall desk, summoned each division before him in turn. The marks of the week were read out and the boys took places, moving either up or down according to their marks ; so that a boy who was at the top of his division one week might find himself at the bottom the next week, and *vice versa*.

On the Sunday after the incident recorded, the boys of the fourth division were sitting in their schoolroom before luncheon, in order to write their weekly letter home. This was the rule of the school. Mr. Whitehead sat at his desk and talked in a friendly manner to the boys. He was writing his weekly report in the large black report

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book that was used for reading over. Mr. Whitehead was talking in a chaffing way as to who was his favourite boy.

"You can tell your people," he said to Hart Minor, "that my favourite is old Polly." Polly was Hart Minor's nickname, which was given to him owing to his resemblance to a parrot. Hart Minor was much pleased at this friendly attitude, and began to think that the unpleasant incident of the week had been really forgotten and that the misgiving which haunted him night and day was a foolish delusion.

"We shall soon be writing the half-term reports," said Mr. Whitehead. "You've all been doing well, especially old Polly: you can put that in your letter," he said to Hart Minor. "I'm very much pleased with you," and he chuckled.

On Monday morning at eleven o'clock was reading over. When the fourth division were called up, the Headmaster paused, looked down the page, then at the boys, then at the book once more; then he frowned. There was a second pause, then he read out in icy tones:

"I'm sorry to say that Smith and Hart Minor have been found guilty of gross dishonesty; they combined—in fact, they entered into a conspiracy—to cheat, to steal marks and obtain by unfair means a higher place and an advantage which was not due to them."

The Headmaster paused. "Hart Minor and Smith," he continued, "go to the bottom of the division. Smith," he added, "I'm astounded at you. Your conduct in this affair is inexplicable. If it were not for your previous record and good conduct, I should have you severely flogged; and if Hart Minor were not a new boy, I should treat him in the same way and have him turned out of the choir. (The choir had special privileges.) As it is,

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you shall lose, each of you, 200 marks, and I shall report the whole matter in detail to your parents in your half-term report, and if anything of the sort ever occurs again, you shall be severely punished. You have been guilty of an act for which, were you not schoolboys, but grown up, you would be put in prison. It is this kind of thing that leads people to penal servitude."

After the reading over was finished and the lessons that followed immediately on it, and the boys went out to wash their hands for luncheon, the boys of the second division crowded round Hart Minor and asked him how he could have perpetrated such a horrible and daring crime. The matter, however, was soon forgotten by the boys, but Hart Minor had not heard the last of it. On the following Sunday in chapel, at the evening service, the Headmaster preached a sermon. He chose as his text "Thou shalt not steal!" The eyes of the whole school were fixed on Smith and Hart Minor. The Headmaster pointed out in his discourse that one might think at first sight that boys at a school might not have the opportunity to violate the tremendous Commandments; but, he said, this was not so. The Commandments were as much a living actuality in school life as they were in the larger world. Coming events cast their shadows before them; the child was the father of the man; what a boy was at school, such would he be in after life. Theft, the boys perhaps thought, was not a sin which immediately concerned them. But there were things which were morally the same if not worse than the actual theft of material and tangible objects—dishonesty in the matter of marks, for instance, and cheating in order to gain an undue advantage over one's fellow-schoolboys. A boy who was guilty of such an act at school would probably end by being a criminal when he went out into the larger

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world. The seeds of depravity were already sown ; the tree whose early shoots were thus blemished would probably be found to be rotten when it grew up ; and for such trees and for such noxious growths there could only be one fate—to be cut down and cast into the unquenchable fire !

In Hart Minor's half-term report, which was sent home to his parents, it was stated that he had been found guilty of the meanest and grossest dishonesty, and that should it occur again he would be first punished and finally expelled.

THE CRICKET MATCH

IT was a Saturday afternoon in June. St. James's School was playing a cricket match against Chippenfield's. The whole school, which consisted of forty boys, with the exception of the eleven who were playing in the match, were gathered together near the pavilion on the steep grassy bank which faced the cricket ground. It was a swelteringly hot day. One of the masters was scoring in the pavilion; two of the boys sat under the post and board where the score was recorded in big white figures painted on the black squares. Most of the boys were sitting on the grass in front of the pavilion.

St. James's won the toss and went in first. After scoring 5 for the first wicket they collapsed; in an hour and five minutes their last wicket fell. They had only made 27 runs. Fortune was against St. James's that day. Hitchens, their captain, in whom the school confidently trusted, was caught out in his first over. And Wormald and Bell Minor, their two best men, both failed to score.

Then Chippenfield's went in. St. James's fast bowlers, Blundell and Anderson Minor, seemed unable to do anything against the Chippenfield's batsmen. The first wicket went down at 70.

The boys who were looking on grew listless: three of them—Gordon, Smith, and Hart Minor—wandered off from the pavilion farther up the slope of the hill, where there was a kind of wooden scaffolding raised for letting

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off fireworks on the 5th of November. The Headmaster, who was a fanatical Conservative, used to burn on that anniversary effigies of Liberal politicians such as Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain, who was at that time a Radical ; while the boys whose politics were Conservative, and who formed the vast majority, cheered, and kicked the Liberals, of whom there were only eight.

Smith, Gordon, and Hart Minor, three little boys aged about eleven, were in the third division of the school. They were not in the Eleven, nor had they any hopes of ever attaining that glory, which conferred the privilege of wearing white flannel instead of grey flannel trousers, and a white flannel cap with a red Maltese cross on it. To tell the truth, the spectacle of this seemingly endless game, in which they did not have even the satisfaction of seeing their own side victorious, began to weigh on their spirits.

They climbed up on to the wooden scaffolding and organised a game of their own, an utterly childish game, which consisted of one boy throwing some dried horse-chestnuts from the top of the scaffolding into the mouth of the boy at the bottom. They soon became engrossed in their occupation, and were thoroughly enjoying themselves, when one of the masters, Mr. Whitehead by name, came towards them with a face like thunder, biting his knuckles, a thing which he did when he was very angry.

"Go indoors at once," he said. "Go up to the third division schoolroom and do two hours' work. You can copy out the Greek irregular verbs."

The boys, taken completely by surprise, but accepting this decree as they accepted everything else, because it never occurred to them it could be otherwise, trotted off, not very disconsolate, to the schoolroom. It was very

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hot out of doors ; it was cool in the third division schoolroom.

They got out their steel pens, their double-lined copy-books, and began mechanically copying out the Greek irregular verbs, with which they were so superficially familiar, and from which they were so fundamentally divorced.

“ Whitey,” said Gordon, “ was in an awful wax ! ”

“ I don’t care,” said Smith. “ I’d just as soon sit here as look on at that beastly match.”

“ But why,” said Hart, “ have we got to do two hours’ work ? ”

“ Oh,” said Gordon, “ he’s just in a wax, that’s all.”

And the matter was not further discussed. At six o’clock the boys had tea. The cricket match had, of course, resulted in a crushing and overwhelming defeat for St. James’s. The rival eleven had been asked to tea ; there were cherries for tea in their honour.

When Gordon, Smith, and Hart Minor entered the dining-room they at once perceived that an atmosphere of gloom and menacing storm was overhanging the school. Their spirits had hitherto been unflagging ; they sat next to each other at the tea-table, but no sooner had they sat down than they were seized by that terrible, uncomfortable feeling so familiar to schoolboys, that something unpleasant was impending, some crime, some accusation—some doom, the nature of which they could not guess, was lying in ambush. This was written on the Headmaster’s face. The Headmaster sat at a square table in the centre of the dining-room. The boys sat round on the farther side of three tables which formed the three sides of the square room.

The meal passed in gloomy silence. Gordon, Smith, and Hart began a fitful conversation, but a message was

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immediately passed up to them from Mr. Whitehead, who sat at the bottom of one of the tables, to stop talking. At the end of tea the guests filed out of the room.

The Headmaster stood up and rapped on his table with a knife.

"The whole school," he said, "will come to the library in ten minutes' time."

The boys left the dining-room. They began to whisper to one another with bated breath. "What's up?" they asked. "What's the matter?" And the boys of the second division shook their heads ominously, and pointing to Gordon, Smith, and Hart, said, "You're in for it this time!" The boys of the first division were too important to take any notice of the rest of the school, and retired to the first division schoolroom in dignified silence.

Ten minutes later the whole school was assembled in the library, from which one flight of stairs led to the upper storeys. The staircase was shrouded from view by a dark curtain hanging from a Gothic arch; it was through this curtain that the Headmaster used dramatically to appear on important occasions, and it was up this staircase that boys guilty of cardinal offences were led off to corporal punishment.

The boys waited in breathless silence. Acute suspense was felt by the whole school, but by none so keenly as by Gordon, Smith, and Hart Minor. These three little boys felt perfectly sick with fear of the unknown and the terror of having in some unknown way made themselves responsible for the calamity which would perhaps vitally affect the whole school.

Presently a rustle was heard, and the Headmaster swept down the staircase and through the curtain, robed in the black silk gown of an LL.D. He stood at a high desk which was placed opposite the staircase in front of

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the boys, who sat, in the order of their divisions, on rows of chairs. The three assistant masters walked in from a side door, also in their gowns, and took seats to the right and left of the Headmaster's desk. There was a breathless silence.

The Headmaster began to speak in grave and icily cold tones ; his face was contracted by a permanent frown.

" I had thought," he said, " that there were in this school some boys who had a notion of gentlemanly behaviour, manly conduct, and common decency. I see that I was mistaken. The behaviour of certain of you to-day—I will not mention them because of their exceeding shame, but you will all know whom I mean. . . ." At this moment all the boys turned round and looked hard at Gordon, Smith, and Hart Minor, who blushed scarlet, and whose eyes filled with tears. . . . " The less said about the matter the better," continued the Headmaster, " but I confess that it is difficult for me to understand how any one, however young, can be so hardened and so wanton as to behave in the callous and indecent way in which certain of you—I need not mention who—have behaved to-day. You have disgraced the school in the eyes of strangers ; you have violated the laws of hospitality and courtesy ; you have shown that in St. James's there is not a gleam of patriotism, not a spark of interest in the school, not a touch of that ordinary common English manliness, that sense for the interests of the school and the community which makes Englishmen what they are. The boys who have been most guilty in this matter have already been punished, and I do not propose to punish them further ; but I had intended to take the whole school for an expedition to the New Forest next week. That expedition will be put off : in fact, it will never take place. Only the Eleven shall go, and I trust

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that another time the miserable idlers and loafers who have brought this shame, this disgrace on the school, who have no self-respect and no self-control, who do not know how to behave like gentlemen, who are idle, vulgar, and depraved, will learn by this lesson to mend their ways and to behave better in the future. But I am sorry to say that it is not only the chief offenders, who, as I have already said, have been punished, who are guilty in this matter. Many of the other boys, although they did not descend to the depths of vulgar behaviour reached by the culprits I have mentioned, showed a considerable lack of patriotism by their apathy and their lack of attention while the cricket match was proceeding this afternoon. I can only hope that this may be a lesson to you all ; but while I trust the chief offenders will feel specially uncomfortable, I wish to impress upon you that you are all, with the exception of the eleven, in a sense guilty."

With these words the Headmaster swept out of the room.

The boys dispersed in whispering groups. Gordon, Smith, and Hart Minor, when they attempted to speak, were met with stony silence ; they were boycotted and cut by the remaining boys.

Gordon and Smith slept in two adjoining cubicles, and in a third adjoining cubicle was an upper division boy called Worthing. That night, after they had gone to bed, Gordon asked Worthing whether, among all the guilty, one just man had not been found.

" Surely," he said, " Campbell Minor, who put up the score during the cricket match, was attentive right through the game, and wouldn't he be allowed to go to the New Forest with the Eleven ? "

" No," said Worthing ; " he whistled twice."

" Oh ! " said Gordon, " I didn't know that. Of course, he can't go ! "

THE MAN WHO GAVE GOOD ADVICE

WHEN he was a child his baby brother came to him one day and said that their elder brother, who was grown up, had got a beautiful small ship in his room. Should he ask him for it? The child who gave good advice said, "No; if you ask him for it he will say you are a spoilt child; but go and play in his room with it before he gets up in the morning, and he will give it you." The baby brother followed this advice, and sure enough two days afterwards he appeared triumphant in the nursery with the ship in his hands, saying, "He said I might choose, the ship or the picture-book." Now the picture-book was a coloured edition of Baron Münchhausen's adventures; the boy who gave good advice had seen it and hankered for it. As his baby brother had refused it there could be no harm in asking for it, so the next time his elder brother sent him on an errand (it was to fetch a pin-cushion from his room), judging the moment to be propitious, he said to him, "May I have the picture-book that baby wouldn't have?" "I don't like little boys who ask," answered the big brother, and there the matter ended.

The child who gave good advice went to school. There was a rage for stag beetles at the school; the boys painted them and made them run races on a chessboard. They imagined—rightly or wrongly—that some stag beetles were much faster than others. A little boy called Bell possessed the stag beetle which was the favourite for the coming races. Another boy called Mason was consumed

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with longing for this stag beetle ; and Bell had said he would give it him in exchange for Mason's catapult, which was famous in the school for the unique straightness of its two prongs. Mason went to the boy who gave good advice and asked him for his opinion. " Don't swap it for your catty," said the boy who gave good advice, " because Bell's stag beetle may not win after all ; and even if it does, stag beetles won't be the rage for very long ; but a catty is always a catty, and yours is the best in the school." Mason took the advice. When the races came off, the stag beetles were so erratic that no prize was awarded, and they immediately ceased to be the rage. The rage for stag beetles was succeeded by a rage for secret alphabets. One boy invented a secret alphabet made of simple hieroglyphics, which was imparted only to a select few, who spent their spare time in corresponding with each other by these cryptic signs. The boy who gave good advice was not of those initiated into the mystery of the cipher, and he longed to be. He made several overtures, but they were all rejected, the reason being that boys of the second division could not let a " third division squat " into their secret. At last the boy who gave good advice offered to one of the initiated the whole of his stamp collection in return for the secret of the alphabet. This offer was accepted. The boy took the stamp collection, but the boy who gave good advice received in return not the true alphabet but a sham one especially manufactured for him. This he found out later ; but recriminations were useless ; besides which, the rage for secret alphabets soon died out, and was replaced by a rage for aquariums, newts, and natterjack toads.

The boy went to a public school. He was a fag. His fag-master had two fags. One morning the other fag came to the boy who gave good advice and said, " Clarke

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(he was the fag-master) told me three days ago to clean his football boots. He's been 'staying out' and hasn't used them, and I forgot. He'll want them to-day, and now there isn't time. I shall pretend I did clean them."

"No, don't do that," said the boy who gave good advice, "because if you say you have cleaned them he will lick you twice as much for having cleaned them badly—say you forgot." The advice was taken, and the fag-master merely said, "Don't forget again." A little later the fag-master had some friends to tea, and told the boy who gave good advice to boil him six eggs for not more than three minutes and a half. The boy who gave good advice, while they were on the fire, took part in a rag which was going on in the passage; the result was that the eggs remained seven minutes in boiling water. They were hard. When the fag-master pointed this out and asked his fag what he meant by it, the boy who gave good advice persisted in his statement that they had been exactly three minutes and a half in the saucepan, and that he had timed them by his watch. So the fag-master caned him for telling lies.

The boy who gave good advice grew into a man and went to the university. There he made friends with a man called Crawley, who went to a neighbouring race-meeting one day and lost two or three hundred pounds.

"I must raise the money from a money-lender somehow," said Crawley to the man who gave good advice, "and on no account must the Master hear of it or he would send me down; or write home, which would be worse."

"On the contrary," said the man who gave good advice, "you must go straight to the Master and tell him

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all about it. He will like you twice as much for ever afterwards ; he never minds people getting into scrapes when he happens to like them, and he likes you and believes you have a great career before you."

Crawley went to the Master of his college and made a clean breast of it. The Master told him he had been foolish—very foolish ; but he arranged the whole matter in such a manner that it never came to the ears of Crawley's extremely violent-tempered and puritanical father.

The man who gave good advice got a " First " in Mods., and every one felt confident he would get a " First " in Greats ; he did brilliantly in nearly all his papers ; but during the Latin Unseen a temporary and sudden lapse of memory came over him and he forgot the English for *manubiæ*, which the day before he had known quite well means prize-money. In fact, the word was written on the first page of his notebook. The word was in his brain, but a small shutter had closed on it for the moment and he could not recall it. He looked over his neighbour's shoulder. His neighbour had translated it " booty." He copied the word mechanically, knowing it was wrong. As he did so he was detected and accused of cribbing. He denied the charge, the matter was investigated, the papers were compared, and the man who gave good advice was disqualified. In all his other papers he had done incomparably better than any one else.

When he left Oxford, the man who gave good advice went into a Government office. He had not been in it long before he perceived that by certain simple reforms the work of the office could be done twice as effectually and half as expensively. He embodied these reforms in a memorandum, and they were not long afterwards adopted. He became private secretary to Snipe, a rising politician,

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and persuaded him to change his party and his politics. Snipe, owing to this advice, became a Cabinet Minister, and the man who gave good advice, having inherited some money, stood for Parliament himself. He stood as a Conservative at a General Election and spoke eloquently to enthusiastic meetings. The wire-pullers prophesied an overwhelming majority, when shortly before the poll, at one of his last meetings, he suddenly declared himself to be an Independent, and made a speech violently in favour of Home Rule and conscription. The result was that the Liberal Imperialist got in by a huge majority, and the man who gave good advice was pelted with rotten eggs.

After this the man who gave good advice abandoned politics and took to finance; in this branch of human affairs he made the fortune of several of his friends, preventing some from putting their money in alluring South African schemes, and advising others to risk theirs on events which seemed to him certain, such as the election of a President or the shortlived nature of a revolution; events which he foresaw with intuition amounting to second-sight. At the same time he lost nearly all his own money by investing it in a company which professed to have discovered a manner—cheap and rapid—of transforming copper into platinum. He made the fortune of a publisher by insisting on the publication of a novel which six intelligent men had declared to be unreadable. It was called *The Conscience of John Digby*, and when published it sold by thousands and tens of thousands. But he lost the handsome reward he received for this service by publishing at his own expense, on magnificent paper, an edition of Rabelais' works in their original tongue. He frequently spotted winners for his friends and for himself, but any money that he won at a

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race-meeting he invariably lost coming home in the train on the three-card trick.

Nor did he lose touch with politicians, and this brought about the final catastrophe. A great friend of his, the eminent John Brooke, had the chance of becoming Prime Minister. Parties were at that time in a state of confusion. The question was, should his friend ally himself with or sever himself for ever from Mr. Capax Nissy, the leader of the Liberal Aristocracy Party, who seemed to have a huge following? His friend, John Brooke, gave a small dinner to his most intimate friends in order to talk over the matter. The man who gave good advice was so eloquent, so cogent in his reasoning, so acute in his perception, that he persuaded Brooke to sever himself for ever from Capax Nissy. He persuaded all who were present, with the exception of Mr. Short-Sight, a pig-headed man who reasoned falsely. So annoyed did the man who gave good advice become with Short-Sight, and so excited in his vexation, that he finally lost his self-control, and hit him as hard as he could on the head—after Short-Sight had repeated a groundless assertion for the seventh time—with the poker.

Short-Sight died, and the man who gave good advice was convicted of wilful murder. He gave admirable advice to his solicitor, but threw away his case as soon as he entered the box himself, which he insisted on doing. He was hanged in gaol at Reading. Many people whom he had benefited in various ways visited him in prison, among others John Brooke, the Prime Minister. It is said that he would certainly have been reprieved but for the intemperate and inexcusable letters he wrote to the Home Secretary from prison.

“It’s a great tragedy—he was a clever man,” said Brooke after dinner, when they were discussing the

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misfortune at Downing Street ; “ a very clever man, but he had no judgment.”

“ No,” said Snipe, the man whose private secretary the man who gave good advice had been, “ that’s it. It’s an awful thing—but he had no judgment.”

THE PRODIGAL WHO CAME BACK TOO LATE

WITH the wherefore of his going away we are not concerned. In his case it was a blend of pride, youth, and ambition. He did not go straight to a far country ; that came afterwards, after he had squandered his substance in Paris, where he was by way of learning to be an artist. His career as an art student was gay but swift. It only lasted six months, and then he sailed for America as a steerage passenger.

When the psychological moment came, which made the hero of the parable resolve to go home, this prodigal wrote a letter. In the course of time he received an answer which filled him with a great longing ; but the pride of his youth had now hardened into determination, and he had made up his mind that he would not go home until he had carved himself a way in the world, and established a sure and independent position.

In ten years' time he was secure, and his aim was sufficiently accomplished for him to have returned without losing an atom of pride ; but he waited. He wanted more. He waited another two years ; by that time he was not only affluent but well known, a man whose name was in italics ; but still he delayed. He made up his mind to go home in the autumn ; but he had waited a year too long. Those for whose welcome he yearned, one shortly after the other, quietly and suddenly, were taken beyond the reach of meetings and partings, beyond the joy of welcome and the sorrow of farewell. He had

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no longer any wish to go home. There was nothing to go home for.

Five years after this he was summoned to England on business, and it so happened that he was obliged to visit some one who lived near his old home. He had taken a taxi from the town. He had to drive straight to his friend's house ; but the taxi-driver was doubtful as to the way, and an invincible something at a turnpike crossing made him tell the driver to take the road which he knew—how well he knew it !—passed through the village of his infancy and the door of his father's house. It was late in July, and it was what they call a real Wessex day. The sky was completely overclouded with a soft grey mist, and somewhere behind it something seemed to be shining less bright than a sun and brighter than a moon, which every now and then sent a silver flicker through the greyness, and quivered on the extreme horizon of the sea, which he caught a glimpse of every now and then, beyond the tall hedges of the lanes.

The air was hot and intensely soft. He felt as if the real world had been shut out by this soft, thick, silver-shot greyness, and that he was moving in a dream-world, or that time had shunted for him and gone back many years, leaving everything as it was save for certain familiar faces. The smell of it all—the pungent aroma of the Southern Coast—penetrated into his brain and opened cell after cell of sleeping memories.

The trees along the drive—how they had grown. They made an imposing fir wood now. He remembered them a miniature plantation. He remembered his elder sister saying to him once, " When you are fourteen that will be a forest." To be fourteen then had sounded something so impossibly far off, so portentously important

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and grown up. He was over thirty-five now ; it was not yet a forest ; his sister had exaggerated. Suddenly the road took a downward slope, the plantation came to an end, and he was driving past the open space where his home stood. He leant out of the taxi and said, " Drive up to that side door."

There was the home exactly the same as when he had left it ; the dignified, comfortable, red-brick Queen Anne house, square, solid, but not cumbersome, with its orderly windows, its green shutters, and its careless trimmings of ivy. There, hidden by a tree, was the new wing, which had been built later, and there was the long wall where the verbena grew, and the cherry-pie, and the sweet geranium—and the flower you pulled to pieces to find the chariot of Venus. Should he or should he not go in ? Mechanically he had already rung the bell before he had decided, and automatically, when the door was opened by a caretaker, and he had asked if he could see over the house, he had run up the back stairs, straight up to the nursery, the room which had been for him a magic tower, looking on to an enchanted world. It was the same ; the wallpaper was there with the flowers he had once wanted to pick, and the long cupboard made by the village carpenter which had held the toys. Then he walked along the passage past the box-room, which had once been a haunt of so much inexpressible romance ; past the sink, where he had organised regattas of yachts made of pieces of cork, with pins for masts ; down the little staircase till he came on the landing which overlooked the large hall.

But it was there that a shock awaited him. The sober walls had been covered with a glaring plush, stamped with sprawling gilded flowers ; every atom of wood-work had been painted and gilded ; meretricious carpets

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were spread over the floor and rolled up in corners of the room, suggesting the idea that should still thicker, still uglier, and still more gaudy carpets be wanted, they were there ready. He walked down the once dignified staircase into the hall and turned into the drawing-room, which he remembered as the delicate and comfortable home of tradition and culture : of books, flowers, music, china, and chintz—classic books : Dickens, Thackeray, Smollett, Pope, Racine ; and so back to the great sources of literature ; classic music : Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven—enlivened by the lilt of Rossini and the gaiety of Donizetti ; flowers that smelt good, and tables on which water-colours were painted ; satin-wood furniture, and large arm-chairs covered with stiff, shiny chintz ; Dresden china and large bowls full of potpourri. Instead of this, the delicate Adam ceiling had been painted bright pink and bright blue, and every detail of the moulding had been gilded ; festoons, like those which decorate a wedding cake, had been slung across the window. The room was full of furniture ; but it was difficult to see it for the amount of brass and other ornaments with which it was covered. Twisted candlesticks, curved reflectors, glaring silk shades, fringes, and tassels seemed to cover every inch of it ; it reeked of the wealth that is spent for the sake of notifying its existence ; it was the final expression of ostentation ; the complete negation of comfort : the last word of what is debased in the coarse expression of the “ new art.” He hurried from this room to others. They were all the same ; one more gaudy, more “ artistic ” than the other. He asked the caretaker who owned the house. It was for sale, she said. It had been bought by a successful commercial man who lived in the East of Scotland ; but he had never lived in the house. He had decorated it, furnished it, and had

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once spent a week there. He had never returned. Now he wanted to sell it.

The Prodigal went out into the garden. So untouched it was, so unaltered in every detail from the last time he had seen it, that everything which had befallen him in the last fifteen years seemed to be the dream. The last glimpse of the tawdry and prostituted rooms was a sharp piece of nightmare, and this was the reality. He walked into the kitchen garden. He found the same tank he had played around with a certain awe as a child, the same dead mole was floating in it, the rain-gauge was in its old place, and he wondered whether the door of the hot-houses where the peaches grew would be locked as it always used to be. There in the narrow passage—with its smell of fresh mould—was the dark little house where the mushrooms grew ; there was the room where the tools lay littered about, which smelt of bast ; as they say happens to a drowning man, the scenes and sights of his childhood rose up before him in a series of clear, sharp-cut pictures. Every one of these places had been a kingdom then, with a strange name and magical qualities. Every one of the trees had been a fort ; every one of the outhouses had been a kingdom, and some of them more terrible than a haunted house or a forest infested by demons. He walked towards the stables. Everything there was unaltered also, and there was the duck-pond into which he had fallen when he was four years old. Only the loose-boxes in the stables were empty ; and a silence brooded over everything. There was not a man in sight, not a dog, not a cat, in that place which had once been so full of bustle and cheerful sounds. He went back into the garden. There, amidst the sharp scent of the flowers, the silence was less oppressive, the sense of dream more natural.

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On the grassy lawn in front of the gardener's house two little children were playing. Surely those were the gardener's children he used to play with. No, the gardener's little boy, his playfellow, was a grown-up man now, as old as himself, dressed in white flannel trousers and a black billycock, for it was Sunday ; and he came out of the house and explained. These were his children—the old gardener's grandchildren.

The children became communicative, and showed the Prodigal round the garden ; they made their father open the hothouses and pick flowers for a nosegay and a bunch of grapes and some peaches for the stranger, and while this happened they stole a tomato.

They prattled on about this and that, about their father and mother, and then one of them, a little girl, said to the Prodigal :

“ And you, haven't you got a father and mother ? ”

“ Yes, I had,” he answered, “ but they are dead.”

“ Dead ? ” said the little girl. “ Who killed them ? ”

The Prodigal did not answer that question. He waved his hand, and walked quickly back to the house, where the taxi was waiting, and in his hurry he quite forgot to take with him the nosegay which the gardener's son had made him, the bunch of grapes, and the peaches.

THE BRASS RING

A LONG time ago, in a country which is now forgotten, there was a king who was heedless of public affairs. He cared only for hunting and playing the flute, and left the business of State to his Ministers. As soon as he came to the throne it was settled, for political reasons, that he should marry the daughter of a neighbouring king. The princess who was chosen for him was young and beautiful ; her face had smooth curves and lines, like those of a wax image carved by a Greek artist ; her eyes were slanting and grey, and her hair was like silk, and sometimes you thought it was brown, and sometimes you thought it was gold. She was as pale as a rare flower that a breath of cold air kills. The King did not love her, but he was proud of her beauty. She respected the King ; she never laughed, and even her smile was sad.

Now at the Court there was a youth called Michael, an officer in the King's bodyguard. He was young, good to look upon, and full of spirit. Directly Michael saw the Queen he fell in love with her, and his life changed from that day ; but he never spoke of his love even to his best friend. He worshipped the Queen from afar, and prayed that some day he might lay down his life for her. A war broke out, and the King took Michael to the war with him ; and Michael fought bravely, and won glory on the field of battle ; and when the war was over, he was made the captain of the King's bodyguard.

THE BRASS RING

Now he saw the Queen more often, and sometimes she would speak a word to him, or smile as he passed, and this would make him happy for many days. As time went on, the King's distaste for business increased, and he left things more and more to his Ministers, who were knaves and cared nothing for the country, but only for their own pockets. And Michael discovered their evil ways, and found out, moreover, that they were betraying their country to the foreigner ; and he faced them with their villainy, and they confessed everything ; and the King beheaded some, and banished others, and made Michael his Prime Minister, because he knew he could trust him. So Michael and the Queen saw more of each other than before. And sometimes he would sit beside her at the banquet ; and sometimes she would consult him on this or that, or talk over the bringing-up of her only child, who was a boy. And one day, when the little Prince was only four years old, the wing of the palace in which he slept caught fire, and the roaring flames spread and cut off all approach to the room where he slept ; and Michael fetched a ladder and climbed into the burning wing, and rushed through the crackling rooms and the suffocating smoke, and bore the child safe out of danger ; and when he had done this he went back once more into the flames, although every one begged him to stop, in order to fetch the Prince's nurse, for whom the little boy was crying ; and he saved the nurse's life.

He was badly burnt and scorched ; and for days he lay between life and death ; but in the end he got well, and the King rewarded him, and the Queen thanked him. After this, never a day passed but the Queen said a kind word to Michael. He fulfilled his duties so well that the country grew prosperous, and people said that Michael was a great man. When war broke out again, he was put

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in command of the army, and he defeated the enemy ; and the fame of his victories spread far and wide.

After the war was over, in the winter, the little Prince fell sick and died, and the Queen nearly died of grief, and she lay sick for a long time ; but in the spring she revived, and when she saw Michael, for the first time she smiled, albeit sadly. But, as time went on, the King grew tired of hearing the praises of Michael sung, and he sent him to govern a distant province and made another man Minister in his place. The evening Michael went away the Queen sent for him. She was in the garden. It was a summer evening ; the bats were flitting in the twilight, and there was a smell of jessamine in the soft air. The Queen said to Michael, " You are going on a long journey to-morrow, and who knows when you will return or what may befall us all during your absence. Take this as a keepsake," and she gave him a little brass ring ; and Michael remembered that the little Prince used to play with this ring and to wear it on his forefinger.

" It is too small for your finger," said the Queen.

" I will wear it round my neck," said Michael.

Then the Queen looked at him and smiled, and her smile was sadder than it had ever been. From the window came the sound of the King's flute-playing : he was playing a merry tune, and he played with great skill. Then the Queen turned and went indoors before Michael could answer a word.

The summer and the autumn passed, the winter came ; and one day a messenger in a sledge brought dispatches from the King to Michael in his distant province, ordering the Court to go into mourning because the Queen was dead ; and Michael and all the King's servants put on black clothes, and the flag on his palace flew at half-mast.

THE BRASS RING

Another year passed, and another messenger came with the news that the King was dead, and that the people had chosen Michael to be King in his stead ; and Michael came back, and entered the capital of the country in triumph ; and the bells rang and the people threw flowers in his path, and he was crowned with pomp in the cathedral ; and there were great rejoicings. But Michael found that the country had fared badly in his absence, and it took him a long time to set everything to rights ; but in the end the country became more prosperous than before. And Michael grew to be a great King, beloved by his people and feared by his enemies, and an Emperor offered him his daughter in marriage, but Michael said him nay. One day he summoned a Minister whom he trusted, and said to him, “ To-morrow I start on a long journey ; I leave the country in your hands.” And Michael travelled into a distant country, in disguise, until he reached a city where learning was held in great esteem, and there he begged a wise man to teach him all he knew. And the sage taught him all he knew ; and one day the sage said to him, “ I can teach you no more, for the pupil is wiser than the master.” Then Michael taught others and acquired renown for wisdom, so that men came to consult him from afar ; and nobody knew that he had once been a King. Michael was now forty years old, and as famous for his wisdom as he had once been for his prowess and for his kingship. But one day he burnt all his books, and left the city and sought a monastery, where monks lived in fasting and prayer and in the service of the poor ; and he said to the Abbot of the monastery, “ For ten years I served my country as a soldier, and for ten years I served my country as a Minister and a King ; and for ten years, casting from me the glory of this world, I learned and taught

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wisdom ; but now I would serve God only—let me enter this monastery.”

The Abbot asked Michael whether he would give up all the things of the world. And Michael said, “ I have given up glory, power, and knowledge. What is there left for me to give up ? ” And as he said this, something fell on the stone floor and made a tinkling noise. Michael saw that the string round his neck was broken, and that the brass ring which the Queen had given him had fallen to the ground.

The Abbot said, “ What is that, my son ? ”

Michael picked up the ring and answered, “ That is only a little brass ring which was once a child's plaything.”

And the Abbot said, “ Cast it out of the window, into the moat below, for thou hast done with worldly possessions.”

And Michael said, “ Give me thy blessing, father, and let me go ; I am not worthy to enter this house and to do this service, for I cannot throw away that ring.”

The Abbot blessed him, and bade him farewell, and told him he should be welcome, if peradventure it were God's will that he should some day return.

And Michael set out on a long pilgrimage and lived off the alms which he begged on the road.

5.00

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